Final-Synopsis of the Thesis Titled

Strategic Human Resource Management Practices Related to Employee Retention Management in Higher Education Institutions of Afghanistan

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By

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1. Introduction

Higher education plays a pivotal role in the socio-economic development of any nation, and Afghanistan is no exception. In a country emerging from decades of conflict and instability, the higher education sector has become central to rebuilding the human capital necessary for sustainable growth. According to Marginson (2016) Institutions of higher learning are not only the breeding grounds for future leaders, professionals, and innovators but also serve as critical incubators for social progress and modernization. In Afghanistan, the importance of higher education is particularly pronounced as the country strives to transform its economy, governance, and society in a highly competitive and globalized world. Education, especially at the tertiary level, is a key driver of human capital development, which is indispensable for enhancing productivity, fostering innovation, and ultimately propelling Afghanistan toward a more stable and prosperous future.

In Afghanistan, higher education is divided into public and private institutions, with public universities playing a fundamental role in educating the majority of the population. Public universities, in particular, are tasked with nurturing the future leaders and professionals required for national rebuilding efforts (Babury & Hayward, 2014). Despite efforts at reform, higher education in Afghanistan faces persistent challenges, including under-resourced institutions, brain drain, and ineffective human resource management (Bittlingmayer et al., 2019).

The scarcity of faculty members, particularly those with advanced degrees, is a critical challenge faced by higher education institutions in Afghanistan. According to Babury & Hayward (2014), Afghanistan's higher education system is severely underdeveloped due to decades of conflict, with only a small percentage of faculty members holding master’s or doctoral degrees. This lack of highly qualified academic staff hampers the quality of education and restricts the ability of institutions to offer diverse and specialized programs. The dearth of faculty with advanced degrees not only affects teaching quality but also stifles research and innovation, which are essential components of a thriving academic environment.

Compounding this issue is the difficulty in retaining the few qualified lecturers within the public university system. As noted by Babury & Hayward, (2014), Afghan faculty members are often attracted to better opportunities abroad, where they can benefit from higher salaries, improved working conditions, and greater career advancement prospects. This "brain drain"

severely limits the ability of public universities to build and sustain a competent academic workforce, leaving institutions in a perpetual state of staffing crises.

Moreover, the challenge of retention is exacerbated by systemic issues within Afghanistan's higher education system, such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to research resources, and low salaries, which diminish job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Khuram & Ochilov, 2023). Faculty members often express frustration over the lack of professional development opportunities and institutional support, further incentivizing them to seek employment outside the country.

Human capital, specifically in the form of faculty members or lecturers, is the lifeblood of any educational institution. Becker (1993), theory of human capital emphasizes that an investment in education and skills development leads to greater economic returns, both for individuals and society. In the context of Afghanistan's higher education, faculty members are central to the knowledge production and dissemination process. Their expertise directly influences the quality of education provided, shaping the next generation of Afghan professionals. As such, the ability of universities to retain their academic staff is critical to their long-term success. Faculty turnover not only affects institutional stability but also undermines academic continuity, mentorship, and research development, which are critical in an environment where higher education is expected to contribute to national development (Allen et al., 2010).

According to (Hom et al., 2017; Samuel & Chipunza, 2009) employee retention refers to the ability of an organization to retain its employees. Generally, employee retention is considered as an employer's attempt to retain the employees in their organization. In this view, retention considered as strategy more than an outcome.

Employee retention, particularly among lecturers, is an essential focus within human resource management in higher education. Research indicates that employee retention significantly impacts institutional success, especially in knowledge-driven sectors like education (Griffeth et al., 2000). High turnover rates can disrupt academic programs, increase recruitment and training costs, and negatively affect student learning outcomes. For Afghan universities, this is a pressing concern, as the loss of experienced faculty members not only depletes institutional knowledge but also contributes to an unstable educational environment. The cost of replacing lecturers is high not only in terms of recruitment expenses but also in the loss of academic expertise and mentorship that departing staff take with them (Holtom et al., 2008).

Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) practices offer a framework through which higher education institutions can address these challenges. SHRM involves aligning human resource practices with the strategic goals of an organization to ensure a more effective and engaged workforce (Rogers and Wright, 1998). In higher education, SHRM practices have been shown to significantly enhance employee retention by promoting job satisfaction, career development, and organizational commitment (Boselie et al., 2005). Specifically, practices such as professional development opportunities, performance-based rewards, and a supportive work environment are crucial for retaining academic staff in universities. In Afghanistan, where public universities face constraints in funding and resources, SHRM can provide strategic solutions to reduce turnover by addressing key factors like job dissatisfaction, lack of career progression, and inadequate compensation (Mahboobullah, 2016).

The role of Human Resource (HR) management has undergone significant changes in recent decades, evolving from a primarily administrative and reactive function to a more strategic and proactive one. Lawler (2005) emphasizes that HR managers today are increasingly adopting a strategic approach, recognizing the crucial link between organizational goals and HR practices. This shift is central to the concept of SHRM, which involves aligning HR activities with the broader business strategy to enhance organizational performance (Allui and Sahni, 2016).

Retaining talented faculty members is especially vital for higher education institutions facing high turnover rates, which result in significant costs and disruptions. Samuel and Chipunza (2009), argue that retaining valuable employees is a pressing concern for HR managers globally, given the increasing rates of turnover and its associated costs. In response, many institutions have implemented SHRM policies to actively promote retention and reduce turnover, recognizing that maintaining a stable and committed workforce is critical to institutional success (Hom et al., 2017). For Afghanistan's public universities, this strategic approach to human resource management can help mitigate the impact of faculty shortages and brain drain, while fostering long-term academic and institutional development.

2. Literature review

The literature on Strategic Human Resource Management and employee retention has evolved significantly over the years, offering diverse perspectives on how organizations can manage human resources effectively to retain key employees. In the context of higher education institutions, especially in Afghanistan, these insights become crucial due to the unique challenges faced by public universities in retaining academic staff.

This section is divided into two parts. The first part, Theoretical Literature Review, presents the key concepts, models, and frameworks that underpin SHRM practices and their influence on employee retention. The second part, Empirical Literature Review, focuses on various studies and empirical evidence from different sectors and countries, including Afghanistan, to highlight how SHRM practices have been implemented and their outcomes in terms of employee retention.

2.1 Theoretical literature review

2.1.1 Social Exchange Theory (SET)

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in Social Exchange Theory (SET), which serves as a key framework for understanding the employer-employee relationship within human resource management (HRM) practices and employee retention. According to SET, interactions between employees and organizations are seen as reciprocal social exchanges, where the quality of these exchanges determines mutual benefits (Cook et al., 2013; Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005). In the context of HRM, organizations that implement effective practices create a positive environment that encourages employees to perform better and remain loyal. As Piasecki (2019) explains, SET can help clarify how HRM practices contribute to employees' growth and long-term retention.

SET operates on the principle that organizational relationships evolve through mutual trust, loyalty, and adherence to shared norms (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Employees are motivated when they perceive high-quality relationships with their employers, characterized by fairness, job security, career development opportunities, and emotional support (Kamau et al., 2020). In such a social setup, employees tend to reciprocate positively when their expectations are met, and negatively when they are not, as people naturally seek to maximize their personal benefits (Cheche et al., 2017). Thus, the quality of social exchanges plays a crucial role in shaping employee retention and organizational commitment.

2.1.2 Organization Equilibrium Theory

Proposed by (March and Simon, 1958), the Organization Equilibrium Theory is one of the earliest frameworks for understanding turnover intentions. The theory highlights the importance of maintaining a balance between the contributions employees make to an organization and the rewards or inducements they receive in return. According to this theory, when an employee perceives that the compensation and benefits provided by the organization

are equal to or greater than their efforts, they are less likely to consider leaving the organization. Moreover, an employee is more likely to remain with the organization if they are satisfied with their job and feel that there are limited alternative employment opportunities.

This theory is highly relevant to employee retention, particularly in the context of higher education institutions in Afghanistan. It suggests that when institutions provide adequate rewards both financial and non-financial employees, such as lecturers and faculty members, are more likely to stay committed and loyal. This theory can help explain how strategic HRM practices, like fair compensation and career development opportunities, contribute to higher retention rates by creating a sense of balance and satisfaction among employees.

2.1.3 Expectancy Confirmation Theory (ECT)

Developed by Vroom (1964), Expectancy Confirmation Theory (ECT) suggests that individuals form expectations about an event, and whether these expectations are met or not directly influences their satisfaction. The theory posits that people enter situations with specific expectations, and when these expectations are fulfilled, satisfaction follows. However, if the outcomes fall short, dissatisfaction occurs (Jiang & Klein, 2009). Vroom (1964) further argues that both pre-event expectations and post-event evaluations combine to shape one's overall satisfaction with the experience. According to Ngo-Henha (2017), organizations can leverage this theory by aligning their management practices with employee expectations to enhance retention and mitigate turnover intentions.

In the context of this study on higher education institutions in Afghanistan, this theory can be instrumental in explaining how strategic HRM practices, such as clear communication of expectations and delivery on promises, contribute to employee retention. When lecturers and faculty members see their expectations met whether in terms of career development, job security, or organizational support they are more likely to stay engaged and committed, reducing the likelihood of turnover.

2.2 Empirical literature review

Takeed et al. (2024) explored the impact of training and development on organizational commitment and employee retention within Afghanistan's banking sector. The study aimed to investigate how investments in human capital, through training and development programs, influence these two critical organizational outcomes. The research employed a mixed-method approach. The findings revealed that training and development significantly enhance employee

retention and organizational commitment by improving skills, motivation, and career advancement opportunities, aligning employees with the organization's goals.

Alnaqbi (2023) in his thesis explored the challenges of employee retention within the socio-economic context of the UAE, emphasizing public organizations in Sharjah and Dubai, the main objectives were to identify the impact of human resource management (HRM) practices and organizational culture on employee retention. The research employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches and key variables examined included HR practices, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, leadership practices, and cultural influences. The findings underscored the significance of job security, job descriptions, job profiles, decentralization, reduced hierarchy, empowerment, accountability, workplace environment, and compensation benefits in influencing job satisfaction and retention.

Kalia et al. (2023) conducted a study to examine the impact of human resource practices (HRPs) on employee retention (ER) in India's textile industry, with job satisfaction (JS) as a mediator and work experience (WE) and job hopping (JH) as moderators. The research, conducted in 14 textile companies located in Punjab. Key variables studied included compensation and performance appraisal (CPA), employee work participation (EWP), grievance handling (GRH), health and safety (HAS), training and development (TAD), JS, and ER. Findings revealed that CPA and EWP had significant positive impacts on JS, while EWP and GRH positively influenced ER. JS fully mediated between CPA and ER, and partially between EWP and ER.

Tabish (2022) explored the factors influencing employee turnover in Afghanistan in a master's thesis. The objective was to examine key factors such as salary/wages, promotion opportunities, supervisor behavior, organizational employee-friendly policies, work-life balance, and job security. A questionnaire was distributed randomly among employees from public and private sector. Salary, promotion, and supervisor behavior emerged as significant factors, while employee-friendly policies, work-life balance, and job security were also identified as critical contributors to turnover.

Wamala and Genza (2022) in their research explored the connection between teacher needs management and the retention of Generation Y educators. Utilizing a cross-sectional survey design the investigation explored the influence of achievement, power, and affiliation needs management on retention. Outcomes highlighted a robust correlation between achievement

needs management and retention, underscoring differentiated salary structures and prompt financial rewards. Power and affiliation need management also positively correlate with retention but to a lesser extent. The study suggested prioritizing achievement needs to enhance Generation Y teacher retention in private secondary schools in Uganda.

Kamau et al. (2021) conducted a study to examine the impact of HRM practices on turnover intentions among teachers in public secondary schools in Murang'a County, Kenya. The study aimed to investigate the effects of compensation, career development, performance appraisal, and training on teachers' turnover intentions. The research utilized binary logistic regression for data analysis. The findings revealed that compensation and training significantly influenced turnover intentions, while career development and performance appraisal had an insignificant effect.

Panda and Sahoo (2021) investigated the relationship between work-life balance (WLB) and employee retention (RPs), with a focus on the mediating role of psychological empowerment (PE) among IT professionals in India. The study used a structured questionnaire and interviews, gathering 283 valid responses from lower and middle-level executives in major IT companies. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to analyze the data. The findings revealed that WLB has a positive relationship with employee retention, and PE acts as a partial mediator, strengthening this relationship. The study highlighted that better WLB and PE contribute significantly to increasing employee retention in software firms.

Sepahvand and Khodashahri (2021) embarked on a study to explore how job engagement moderates the influence of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) practices on employee retention. Utilizing a questionnaire with validated items to gauge SHRM practices, employee retention, and job engagement. Key findings underscored the significant impact of SHRM practices on employee retention and the moderating role of job engagement, particularly through dimensions such as vigor, dedication, and absorption, offering pragmatic insights for organizations to bolster employee retention through enhanced job engagement.

Khan et al. (2021) researched to explore the determinants influencing faculty retention in higher education institutions accredited by ABET. The research encompassed 27 Self-Study Reports (SSRs) from ABET-accredited institutions to gather data on faculty size, professional development initiatives, student-to-faculty ratio, and faculty workload. The study scrutinized variables pertinent to faculty retention and institutional support, revealing that a minimal

number of faculty members departed from ABET-accredited institutions, indicative of favorable faculty retention. The study suggested that institutions holding ABET accreditation typically meet criteria conducive to faculty retention, resulting in high retention rates.

Shehnaz et al. (2021) embarked on the article to explore the influence of HR practices on employee retention in higher education institutions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The primary objective was to identify the HR factors exerting a strong influence on employees' inclination to remain within the organization. Employing a quantitative approach, the study scrutinized variables such as compensation, acknowledgment of performance, and professional development concerning employee retention. Principal findings indicated a significant correlation between these HR factors and employee retention, with acknowledgment of performance exhibiting the most substantial influence.

Musawer et al. (2021) examined the factors influencing employees' intention to quit their jobs in private universities in Kabul, Afghanistan. The research identified job satisfaction, job stress, person-organization fit, and organizational commitment as independent variables, while turnover intention serves as the dependent variable. The findings revealed significant and negative correlations between employees' job satisfaction, person-organization fit, organizational commitment, and their intention to leave the organization. Conversely, job stress exhibits a positive correlation with turnover intention, suggesting that reducing job stress could help alleviate employee turnover. The study provides valuable insights into the specific context of private universities in Kabul.

Mohsen & Sarbuland (2020) conducted research focusing on how employee satisfaction impacts retention at Afghan Mili Bank in Kabul, Afghanistan. The research underscored the importance of job satisfaction in retaining employees and acknowledges job satisfaction's emotional and perceptual dimensions and its role in fulfilling employee needs. Effective leadership and a supportive work environment are highlighted as crucial for enhancing job satisfaction and fostering employee commitment and cooperation. Quantitative analysis confirms a positive correlation between job satisfaction and retention, with equitable compensation being paramount. The study recommended strategies such as fair pay, performance-based promotions, supportive leadership, and training to improve job satisfaction and consequently employee retention.

Minh and Nwachukwu (2020) in their paper examined the correlation between strategic human resource management (SHRM) practices, organizational culture, and academic staff retention within universities. The primary aim was to formulate a conceptual framework and propositions for future exploration. Employing a systematic literature review spanning from 1980 to 2019, the study identified key variables including SHRM practices such as recruitment, training, compensation, work-life balance, and performance management, alongside the moderating influence of organizational culture. The principal findings proposed a linked model and six propositions for validation, highlighting the pivotal role of a robust organizational culture in amplifying the positive impact of SHRM practices on academic staff retention.

Javed et al. (2019) conducted a study to examine how HRM practices affect job satisfaction among employees in higher education institutions. The primary objective was to evaluate the impact of recruitment and selection, training and development, and performance appraisal on employee job satisfaction. The study analyzed variables such as HRM practices, recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, and job satisfaction. The findings indicated that overall HRM practices significantly influenced job satisfaction in both government and private universities, with no significant differences in performance appraisal practices between the two.

Latifi & Lim (2019) aimed to analyze the role of strategic human resource management (SHRM) in the Afghanistan ministry of mines and petroleum (MoMP) from a network perspective. The study involved face-to-face interviews with public officials from MoMP and external stakeholders, utilizing social network analysis (SNA) to examine the formation of networks for each HRM practice. The research concentrated on the collaboration between the HR department and other departments or external organizations, assessing the presence of SHRM characteristics in MoMP. Findings indicated that despite challenges in implementing administrative reform, certain aspects of SHRM are evident in MoMP, suggesting SHRM's potential contribution to organizational sustainability.

Adil (2019) in their study examined the impact of talent management and employee retention on organizational performance within Kabul-based public and private banks in Afghanistan. Through statistical analysis, the study unveiled a positive and significant relationship between talent management, employee retention, and organizational performance. The findings emphasized the importance of effective talent management practices for both public and private

banks operating in Kabul, stressing that a well-executed talent management strategy contributes to enhanced organizational performance and prolonged employee retention. This study thus offers valuable insights for bank managers in Kabul to formulate and implement strategies that harness talent and improve organizational outcomes.

Fletcher et al. (2018) explore the impact of perceived training and development on employee retention through the mediating role of work attitudes. Using data employees across seven UK organizations, they employed multilevel analyses based on Russell's model of core affect to test the relationships between perceived T&D, work attitudes (job satisfaction, employee engagement, change-related anxiety, and emotional exhaustion), and intention to stay. The study found that job satisfaction, employee engagement, and change-related anxiety fully mediated the relationship between perceived T&D and employee retention, while emotional exhaustion did not significantly mediate the relationship.

Gaber and Fahim (2018) In Their article explored the connection between Strategic HRM (SHRM) practices and employee retention within the public sector. Employing a field survey statistical analysis reveals that SHRM practices, including recruitment, training, performance appraisal, and compensation, have a significant positive effect on employee retention at NBE. The study also examined the moderating influence of demographic and professional characteristics on this relationship. The research findings underscored the critical role of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) in enhancing organizational competitiveness and retaining core talents.

Ashley (2018) in his research paper sought to examine the factors impacting faculty retention in higher education institutions, particularly focusing on South African circumstances. The exploration scrutinized various variables such as instructor assessments, equal opportunities, workloads, age, gender, and employee discontent to grasp their influence on faculty retention. The primary discoveries emphasized the importance of addressing staff dissatisfaction, especially concerning compensation, workloads, and non-permanent contracts, to secure faculty retention. The investigation also stressed the necessity for additional efforts to enrich retention strategies in higher education.

Allui and Sahni (2016) in their research paper investigated the implementation of SHRM practices within Saudi Arabian universities. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study surveyed staff to assess the extent of SHRM implementation. Variables examined include

strategic alignment, staffing, performance appraisal, compensation, training & development, and retention plans. The findings revealed a strong awareness of SHRM but identified challenges in human capital development, faculty recruitment/selection, and the performance appraisal & compensation system. The study offered insights for administrators and faculty seeking to improve SHRM practices in Saudi higher education.

2.3 Research gap: the untapped nexus between SHRM practices and employee retention

Although employee retention and turnover research has seen considerable theoretical advancement in recent years (Holtom et al., 2008), there remains a significant gap in understanding the relationship between SHRM practices and employee retention, particularly in the higher education sector. Much of the existing literature focuses on the business sector, with limited attention paid to which specific HRM practices contribute to sustainable competitive advantage and long-term staff retention (Boxall & Purcell, 2003). In Afghanistan's higher education institutions, where there is a critical shortage of qualified faculty members, these gaps become even more pronounced. The sector faces retention challenges due to a lack of structured professional development, insufficient compensation, and ineffective SHRM strategies, all of which exacerbate the difficulty in retaining skilled academic staff.

At the same time, the reviewed literature has revealed mixed results regarding the effect of SHRM indicators on employee retention in organizations, making it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about this impact. Additionally, the mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationship between SHRM practices and employee retention has not been extensively explored. In some studies, job satisfaction has been shown to significantly mediate this relationship, while in others, the mediating effect is less clear. This inconsistency highlights the need for more targeted research, particularly in developing countries like Afghanistan, where socio-political and cultural factors may influence how these practices affect employee retention and how job satisfaction serves as a mediator. Therefore, further investigation is essential to identify the specific SHRM practices that are most effective in retaining qualified faculty in Afghanistan's public higher education sector and how job satisfaction mediates this relationship.

3. Conceptual framework and hypotheses formulation

Human resource management practices are developed to strategically manage employees or human capital in order to meet organizational objectives. These practices aim to improve the skills, efficiency, commitment, and productivity of the workforce (Zahoor et al., 2015). HRM

Practices can differ across organizations as they are tailored to address the specific needs of employees, with varying practices applied to different employee groups (Piasecki, 2019; Presbitero et al., 2015). Although research highlights various methods for assessing these practices, there is no universally accepted definition or framework for identifying the most critical practices, either theoretically or empirically (Mahmood et al., 2019).

Empirical studies have consistently shown that human resource management (HRM) practices like training and development, compensation and rewards, performance appraisal, work-life balance, and leadership play a strategic role in influencing both job satisfaction and employee retention (Gaber and Fahim, 2018; Allui and Sahni, 2016; Minh and Nwachukwu, 2020; Sepahvand and Khodashahri, 2021).

This study is focusing on evaluating the impact of these practices on employee retention, with job satisfaction serving as a mediating factor, within the context of higher education institutions in Afghanistan, where retaining skilled faculty members is critical for institutional success and the quality of education.

3.1 Training and development, job satisfaction and employee retention

Training is a structured approach aimed at aligning career objectives with individual capabilities, enabling employees to acquire the skills needed to perform their roles effectively (Armstrong, 2014; Subramaniam et al., 2011). By investing in training and development, organizations can foster stronger relationships with employees by enhancing their knowledge and skills, which leads to increased job satisfaction and commitment (Ngoma and Ntale, 2019). Piaralal et al. (2016) also emphasize that empowerment and training can positively impact service recovery performance, further enhancing employee retention. Additionally, (Rombaut and Guerry, 2019) highlight the importance of offering growth and development opportunities, either through internal or external training, to ensure a skilled workforce capable of addressing organizational challenges. Kaushal and Singla (2020) notes that training prepares employees to thrive in a dynamic business environment, while Piasecki (2019) points out that it also provides career advancement opportunities, motivating employees to stay with their current employers. Based on this discussion, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1. Training and development has a positive and significant impact on job satisfaction.
H2. Training and development has a positive and significant impact on employee retention.

3.2 Compensation and rewards, job satisfaction and employee retention

Compensation and rewards are elements of the total rewards framework within human resource management that aim to attract, retain, and motivate employees by providing financial and non-financial incentives for their contributions to the organization's success (Gaber and Fahim, 2018). Many studies suggest that compensation and rewards are highly effective in retaining employees and boosting job satisfaction (Rombaut & Guerry, 2019). An appropriate pay structure can boost employee motivation, leading to improved productivity, efficiency, and a competitive edge. It also fosters a sense of security, which reduces stress and enhances employee performance and satisfaction (Nazir et al., 2013). Higher compensation packages are often associated with greater job satisfaction, employee commitment and longer tenure with their current employer (Cherif, 2020). Building on this discussion, the study suggests the following hypotheses:

H3. Compensation and rewards has a positive and significant impact on job satisfaction.
H4. Compensation and rewards has a positive and significant impact on employee retention.

3.3 Performance appraisal job satisfaction and employee retention

Performance appraisal is a key HR practice that evaluates both the strengths and areas for improvement in employee performance (Kalia et al., 2023). According to Gupta (2012) it involves assessing an employee's current performance and their potential for future growth. Fairness in compensation and performance appraisal fosters a positive attitude, strengthens employee commitment, and enhances job satisfaction (Hogan et al., 2007), which in turn supports employee retention. These practices ensure quality at work, boosting employee loyalty and satisfaction, ultimately promoting retention (Lasisi et al., 2020; Waheed et al., 2018). Kuvaas (2006) suggested that an effective performance appraisal system serves as a tool for developing, retaining, and motivating employees within an organization. Additionally, based on Social Exchange Theory, Cook et al., (2013), when employees perceive that decisions are made transparently and their performance is evaluated fairly, they are more inclined to remain with the organization for a longer period. Hence, based on this literature, the following hypothesis are proposed:

H5. Performance appraisal has a positive and significant impact on job satisfaction.
H6. Performance appraisal has a positive and significant impact on employee retention.

3.4 Leadership, job satisfaction and employee retention

Leadership is the process of influencing and guiding individuals or groups toward achieving shared goals and objectives. It involves the ability to inspire, motivate, and empower others to

contribute their best efforts towards a common vision or purpose (Hauer et al., 2021). Leadership plays a crucial role in shaping organizational goals and influencing employee performance (Erkutlu, 2008). Leaders are expected to act as positive role models for their subordinates, which helps enhance employee job satisfaction and commitment to delivering excellent services (Clark et al., 2009; Erkutlu, 2008). According to Kim & Brymer (2011), leadership behavior significantly affects employee satisfaction by motivating and inspiring staff, addressing individual needs, fostering a supportive organizational climate, and promoting strong moral values, which ultimately contribute to longer tenure and improved employee retention. Building on the insights from this literature, the study puts forth the following hypothesis:

H7. Leadership has a positive and significant impact on job satisfaction.
H8. Leadership has a positive and significant impact on employee retention.

3.5 Work and life balance, job satisfaction and employee retention

In today's competitive environment, work-life balance (WLB) is a crucial topic that integrates the family and job responsibilities of professionals (Pattusamy & Jacob, 2017). Research suggests that employees who engage in WLB programs are more likely to remain with their organizations for extended periods (Panda & Sahoo, 2021; Solanki & Singh, 2015). Such programs can improve employee morale, reduce absenteeism, and enhance workforce retention (Kanwar et al., 2009). WLB contributes to increased motivation, job satisfaction, and retention, although evidence supporting this is often based on observed outcomes (Pocock, 2005). Studies indicate that WLB, coupled with managerial support, plays a crucial role in shaping employees' intentions to stay or leave (Brough et al., 2014; Grzywacz et al., 2002; Panda & Sahoo, 2021). Additionally, managerial neglect and insufficient WLB support may drive turnover intentions. Cegarra-leiva et al. (2012) found that job satisfaction is a key determinant of both WLB and employee retention. Therefore, this study argues that:

H9. Work and life balance has a positive and significant impact on job satisfaction.
H10. Work and life balance has a positive and significant impact on employee retention.

Furthermore, Job satisfaction plays a pivotal role in directly influencing employee retention. Employees who feel satisfied with their jobs, whether through fair compensation, performance appraisals, or supportive leadership, are more likely to stay with their current employer (Cherif, 2020; Kaushal & Singla, 2020). High levels of JS foster loyalty and commitment, reducing turnover intentions (Cegarra-leiva et al., 2012). When organizations create environments where employees' needs are met and expectations fulfilled, JS increases, leading to longer tenure and

enhanced retention (Kanwar et al., 2009). Drawing from these insights, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H11: Job satisfaction has a positive and significant impact on employee retention.

3.6 The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction

According to Social Exchange Theory (SET), reciprocity implies that effective HRM practices and fair treatment by employers will foster positive employee behavior and lead to higher levels of Job satisfaction (Ahmad and Umrani, 2019; Doghan and Bhatti, 2019). Research by Huang and Su (2016) and Kalia et al., (2023) highlights the mediating role of job satisfaction in reducing turnover intentions. Similarly, Garg (2019) found that Job satisfaction act as a mediator between organizational performance and high-performance work practices, while Azeem et al. (2020) suggest that dissatisfaction with one's job triggers thoughts of leaving. Satisfied employees are more likely to view their work environment positively, which strengthens employee retention (Stamolampros et al., 2019). Conversely, low JBS has been found to correlate negatively with employee retention (Nazia & Begum, 2021). Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H12. Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between training and development and employee retention.

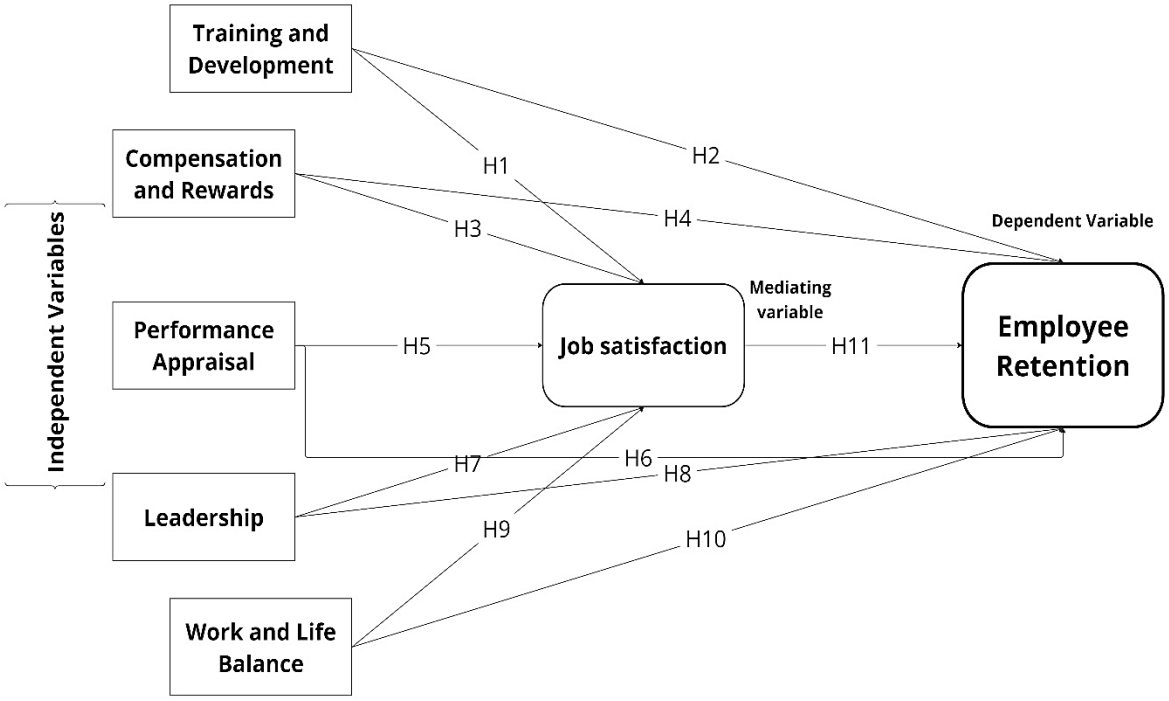
H13. Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between compensation and rewards and employee retention.

H14. Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between performance appraisal and employee retention.

H15. Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between leadership and employee retention.

H16. Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between work and life balance and employee retention.

Figure 1 Conceptual framework of the study



Source: Figure by researcher

Note: Hypotheses H1–H11 represent direct relationships between variables and are depicted in the diagram. However, the indirect relationships, represented by hypotheses H12–H16, also exist but are not visually shown in the diagram.

4. Problem statement and research questions

Afghanistan's higher education institutions face significant faculty retention challenges, exacerbated by the ongoing brain drain. Babury and Hayward (2014) discuss how the lure of better opportunities abroad attracts the nation's most qualified professionals, leaving behind a talent vacuum. This exodus is particularly evident among highly educated faculty members, with only a limited number of professors and doctorate holders remaining in the country. The few who remain often contend with poor working conditions, low compensation, and limited professional growth, making retention an even more pressing issue.

According to the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE, 2023) the faculty composition in Afghanistan’s public higher education institutions highlights a pressing issue concerning the academic ranks and educational qualifications of the teaching staff. As shown in Tables 1 and 2, a significant portion of the faculty is concentrated in lower academic ranks, with the majority holding only bachelor's or master's degrees. Specifically, only 366 faculty members possess a Ph.D., and a mere 178 individuals have reached the rank of professor. This limited pool of highly educated and experienced faculty members accentuates the challenge of retaining skilled

professionals within the country. This scarcity, coupled with the brain drain and limited professional development opportunities, further constrains the ability of higher education institutions to foster growth and excellence, emphasizing the urgent need for strategic human resource interventions.

Table 1 Faculty members by academic rank in public HEI

Academic Rank	Male	Female	Total
Junior Teaching Assistant	125	6	131
Nominated Teaching Assistant	1574	146	1720
Teaching Assistant	2113	265	2378
Senior Teaching Assistant	1330	112	1442
Assistant Professor	472	67	539
Associate Professor	379	66	445
Professor	170	8	178
Grand Total	6163	670	6833

Source: Data taken from MoHE 2023

Table 2 Faculty members by higher education level in public HEI

Higher Education Level	Male	Female	Total
Bachelor's degree	2195	264	2459
Master's degree	3620	388	4008
PhD	348	18	366
Grand Total	6163	670	6833

Source: Data taken from MoHE 2023

Given the pivotal role that faculty quality plays in the development of Afghanistan's educational system, retaining skilled lecturers is crucial for the nation's future. As higher education institutions strive to build competitive programs, the ongoing departure of qualified staff severely hampers progress. Leadership, compensation, and development opportunities are critical SHRM practices that can enhance job satisfaction and, ultimately, employee retention. Addressing these gaps requires a deeper exploration of how SHRM practices can create a more conducive environment for faculty to stay.

In this context, the study aims to explore the following broader research questions, addressing multiple facets of the issues at hand:

1. What are the key challenges and opportunities in the current state of higher education institutions in Afghanistan, particularly concerning faculty retention and institutional development?

2. How do SHRM practices, such as compensation, leadership, training and development opportunities, performance appraisal and work/life balance affect faculty retention in Afghanistan higher education institutions?
3. To what extent does job satisfaction mediate the relationship between SHRM practices and employee retention?
4. Which SHRM practices contribute the most and the least to faculty retention?
5. What strategies can be developed to improve retention and address the unique challenges faced by Afghanistan's higher education sector?

5. Objectives of the study

Based on the research questions outlined, the study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. Examine the current status challenges and opportunities in higher education institutions of Afghanistan, with a focus on faculty retention and institutional development.
2. Assess the impact of SHRM practices (compensation, leadership, training and development, performance appraisal, and work/life balance) on faculty retention in Afghanistan's higher education institutions.
3. Investigate the mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationship between SHRM practices and faculty retention.
4. Identify the most and least effective SHRM practices contributing to faculty retention in Afghanistan's higher education sector.
5. Propose strategies to improve faculty retention, addressing the unique challenges within Afghanistan's higher education institutions, including brain drain and the attraction of qualified faculty abroad.

6. Research methodology

Research methodology, often used synonymously with research approach, refers to the systematic, theoretical analysis of the methods applied to a field of study. According to Saunders et al. (2019), research methodology involves the entire process of planning, conducting, and interpreting research, including the choice of research design, data collection methods, and analytical strategies. It is guided by the research philosophy and theoretical framework, which together influence how data is interpreted and how findings are presented. Creswell & Creswell (2016), emphasize that research methodology involves not only the methods themselves but also the reasoning behind their use, ensuring that the research process is coherent, logical, and consistent with the overall research aims.

There are three types of research approaches: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. In this study, a quantitative research approach has been adopted to investigate strategic human resource management (SHRM) practices related to employee retention management in higher education institutions in Afghanistan. The quantitative approach was chosen for its ability to test hypotheses and examine the relationships among variables using statistical analysis.

6.1 Research design

Research design serving as the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data. It provides the structure within which the research is conducted, ensuring that the study is systematically and logically carried out to address the research questions or hypotheses (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Easterby-Smith et al., 2009).

There are several types of research designs such as: descriptive, exploratory, explanatory, experimental and etc... each suited to different types of research problems and objectives. For this study descriptive and explanatory research designs are the most appropriate choices. These designs are well-suited to the study's objectives, which involve describing and explaining the relationships between strategic human resource management (SHRM) practices and employee retention.

6.2 Survey design

In quantitative research, various designs are used to investigate different research questions. Among these two primary quantitative research designs are survey research and experimental research (Creswell & Creswell, 2016). Survey research design offers a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions within a population by analyzing data from a sample. It includes both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, employing questionnaires or structured interviews to gather data (Fowler, 2016). For the current study a cross-sectional survey design has been selected. This approach is ideal for capturing and analyzing the broader trends and relationships between the variables of interest across a significant sample, allowing for generalization to the wider population.

6.2.1 Target population of the study

According to Bryman (2016), The population of a study refers to the entire group of individuals or entities that share common characteristics, from which a researcher intends to draw conclusions. The population for this study comprises the academic staff or lecturers working in public higher education institutions in Afghanistan. Given the broad scope of Afghanistan's

higher education system, the study narrows its focus to public universities within three key provinces (Kabul, Kandahar, Khost), each representing a distinct zonal region of the country. By selecting all public institutions (universities) within these provinces, the study aims to gather comprehensive data that reflects the diverse academic environments across different regions. In selecting the three provinces—Kabul, Kandahar, and Khost—for this study, several factors were considered: regional representation, quality and quantity of faculty members, historical significance, access and feasibility of data collection.

Table 3 Target population of the study in three provinces of Afghanistan

Province	University	Male	Female	Total
Kabul	Kabul university	636	95	731
	Kabul Medical University	214	75	289
	Kabul Polytechnic University	221	24	245
	Kabul Education University	229	63	292
Kandahar	Kandahar University	272	3	275
	Agriculture Technology Kandahar	106	0	106
Khost	Shaikh Zayed Khost University	294	0	294
Grand Total		1972	260	2232

Source: Data taken from MoHE 2023

6.2.2 Sample size of the study

The study employed a targeted selection strategy, choosing three provinces, which represent three distinct regions of Afghanistan. This selection ensures that the data collected from these regions can be generalized to the broader population of the study, as these areas host a significant number of qualified faculty members in higher education institutions.

In survey research, some researchers opt for a sample size by choosing a percentage of the total population (such as 10%) or by following sample sizes used in previous studies. However, these methods are not ideal. Instead, the sample size should be determined based on the planned analysis and anticipated results (Creswell & Creswell, 2016; Fowler, 2016).

As this study is applying Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the sample size was determined using the 10:1 ratio technique, a common method used in SEM. This technique recommends selecting at least 10 respondents for each variable or parameter included in the model. According to Farid Talukder et al. (2022); Kock & Hadaya, (2018); Hair et al., (2020), a 10:1 ratio is considered an effective rule of thumb, particularly when dealing with complex models that contain multiple latent variables and paths.

Since the study includes 35 statements or parameters to measure the variables, following the 10:1 ratio technique for sample size determination, the total sample size is calculated by multiplying 35 by 10. This results in a sample size of 350 participants for the study.

Table 4 Distribution of sample size among targeted population

University	Total Population	Sample Size	Percentage
Kabul university	731	115	33%
Kabul Medical University	289	45	13%
Kabul Polytechnic University	245	38	11%
Kabul Education University	292	46	13%
Kandahar University	275	43	12%
Agriculture Technology Kandahar	106	17	5%
Shaikh Zayed Khost University	294	46	13%
Total	2232	350	100%

Source: Table by researcher

6.2.3 Sampling technique adopted

The study adopted a non-probability sampling technique, specifically convenience sampling, to collect data from the selected sample size. Convenience sampling is a method where participants are selected based on their availability and ease of access to the researcher (Etikan et al., 2016). This technique is often used when it is not feasible to access the entire population due to practical considerations such as time, cost, transportation issues, or the availability of participants. Researchers may resort to convenience sampling when they face difficulties in randomly selecting participants or when their target population is hard to reach (Hamed Taherdoost, 2016).

In this study, the choice of convenience sampling is justified by the practical limitations faced by the researcher, and primarily by the availability of data. Specifically, there is no comprehensive list of teachers with names and departments in the selected higher education institutions, making it challenging to employ random sampling techniques. Without such detailed records, it becomes difficult to select participants systematically. Therefore, convenience sampling allows the researcher to collect data from available and accessible respondents, ensuring the study can be completed within a reasonable timeframe. Additionally, logistical constraints, such as geographical access and limited resources, further reinforce the need for this practical sampling approach.

A similar approach and convenience sampling has been adopted in various other studies to measure strategic human resource management practices related to employee retention,

particularly in contexts where complete datasets or access to the entire population were limited (Imna & Hassan, 2015; Machhi & Parmar, 2023; Guchait & Cho, 2010; Hong et al., 2012).

6.2.4. Questionnaire design and structure

A questionnaire, defined as a list of carefully structured questions, is one of the most popular methods and research instrument for data collection (Fowler, 2016). Various types of questionnaires exist, such as online, mail, telephone, and personally administered questionnaires, each with its own advantages (Collis & Hussey, 2014). In this study, a mixed approach was adopted: a self-administered questionnaire was used for respondents within the researcher's reach, while an online Google Form was distributed via social media platforms and official emails to participants outside the researcher's physical access. This approach ensured a higher response rate, precise targeting, and flexibility in data collection.

The questionnaire used in this study was structured to cover multiple key areas, ensuring that respondents' perspectives and experiences were captured efficiently. The questionnaire comprised several parts: Cover page, Respondent's profile, Human resource management practices, Job satisfaction and employee retention.

6.2.5 Measurement of variables

The variables in this study were measured using well-established scales adapted from previous studies to ensure validity and reliability. The questionnaire was designed to capture the key constructs central to the research on strategic human resource management practices, job satisfaction, and employee retention in Afghanistan's higher education institutions.

Table 5 Measurement of the latent constructs (variables)

Construct	Measurement Indicators	Sources
Training and Development	Our institution has a clear and active training and development policy Opportunities for professional development and promotion are readily available to lecturers in our institution The training programs offered by our institution effectively enhance lecturers' skills and knowledge The institution provides sufficient resources for lecturers' training and development Training programs are monitored and aligned with the career goals of lecturers	Tessema and Soeters (2006)
Compensation and Rewards	Our institution has an attractive and competitive compensation system	Tessema and Soeters (2006)

	I feel that my compensation is fair compared to similar positions in other institutions The salary range encourages better performance The institution's pay scale accurately represents the efforts and achievements of the lecturers Compensation and reward structures are transparent and understandable to lecturers	
Performance Appraisal	Performance appraisals in our institution provide constructive feedback for improvement Performance evaluation criteria are clearly communicated to lecturers I feel that performance appraisals accurately reflect my contributions to the institution Supervisors effectively discuss career development opportunities during performance appraisals The performance appraisal process motivates me to perform better in my role	Robinson et al. (2007)
Leadership	Government leadership ensures that policies are applied fairly across all higher education institutions Government leadership has a clear vision for the development and improvement of our institution The government engages with higher education institutions to understand their challenges and needs Government policies contribute to job security and stability for lecturers in our institution Government policies include mechanisms for acknowledging and celebrating the academic achievements of lecturers	Kyndt et al. (2009) Delery and Doty (2007)
Work and Life Balance	The institution supports initiatives to promote a healthy work-life balance I feel able to manage my work responsibilities alongside personal commitments Flexible work arrangements offered by the institution contribute to a better work-life balance The institution provides me with the flexibility to handle personal emergencies The institution values the well-being of lecturers as much as productivity	Brough et al. (2014) Grzywacz et al. (2002)
Job Satisfaction	My job allows me to use my skills and abilities effectively I am satisfied with the level of independence I have in my job My job involves a variety of tasks that keep me engaged The tasks I perform in my job contribute to the overall success of the institution	Spector (1997)

	I find my job to be interesting and engaging	
Employee Retention	I intend to continue working at this institution for the foreseeable future	Robinson et al. (2007)
	I see a future for myself within this institution	
	I would recommend this institution as a good place to work to others	
	Staying with this institution will benefit my professional career	Kyndt et al. (2009)
	Considering other opportunities, I still prefer to remain employed at this institution	

Source: Table by researcher

6.3 Data preparation and cleaning

In this study, a total of 350 questionnaires were distributed to the selected sample, as previously specified. As a result, the response rate was notably high, with 339 completed questionnaires collected out of the 350 distributed.

Data cleaning is a crucial step in data analysis, particularly in studies employing complex statistical techniques like Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Therefore, identifying and removing outliers, incorrect responses, and duplicated entries is fundamental to maintaining data quality (Kline, 2015). In this study, after the initial collection of 339 questionnaires, the data underwent a thorough cleaning process. Part of this process involved scrutinizing the responses to identify suspicious patterns, such as incorrectly structured data or duplicated entries. Special attention was given to "straight-line" responses, where respondents answered all questions in a uniform pattern, indicating a lack of engagement in the survey. Following this detailed review, 10 additional responses were omitted from the analysis due to non-engagement or inconsistent answers. This ensured that the final dataset was clean, reliable, and suitable for SEM analysis.

The final dataset for this study consisted of 329 usable questionnaires, which exceeded the minimum sample size required for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). According to (Hair et al., 2010), a minimum sample size of 155 is necessary when path coefficients range from 0.11 to 0.20 at a significance level of 0.005. Additionally, the sample size of 329 is consistent with Yemane's formula for sample size selection, which would estimate a sample size of approximately 330 for this study. This ensures that the sample is robust enough to produce valid and generalizable results for the analysis of this study.

6.4 Sources of data

This study utilized both primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected from faculty members of public higher education institutions in Afghanistan, ensuring a direct insight into the perspectives and experiences relevant to the research. Secondary data was sourced from established academic journals and reputable sources, including published reports and articles.

6.5 Data Analysis

The data obtained in this study was analyzed and interpreted to address the research questions and fulfill the study's objectives. Data analysis is the process of applying logical reasoning to extract meaning from the collected data. The type of analysis chosen is influenced by factors such as the nature of the variables, their distribution, and the research design's capacity to collect relevant data. In previous studies, multiple regression has been commonly used to analyze the components of employee retention and job satisfaction.

While multiple regression is useful for understanding the impact of specific variables at different stages, it has limitations—most notably, its inability to examine multiple constructs simultaneously. Given these shortcomings, structural equation modeling (SEM) offers a more comprehensive solution, as it allows for the simultaneous analysis of multiple relationships between constructs. Therefore, in this study, PLS-SEM was chosen over traditional regression techniques to better capture the complexity of the relationships between strategic human resource management practices, job satisfaction, and employee retention.

To analyze the data gathered through the field survey, three main software tools were utilized: Microsoft Excel, Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and Smart PLS.

7. Scope and significance of the study

This study focuses on examining the strategic human resource management (SHRM) practices and their impact on faculty retention in higher education institutions in Afghanistan. By investigating core practices such as compensation, leadership, training and development, performance appraisal, and work-life balance, the study explores how these elements contribute to employee retention, with job satisfaction as a mediating factor.

The scope of this study is focused on public higher education institutions in Afghanistan. Given the broad nature of this sector, the research has been narrowed to institutions in three key provinces, each representing different regions of the country. where faculty retention has

emerged as a critical issue due to brain drain, the attraction of qualified faculty members abroad, and the scarcity of highly qualified faculty members or academicians, including PhD holders and high-ranking academics like professors and associate professors. The study also aims to contribute to policy recommendations for higher education institutions in Afghanistan to enhance their strategies for retaining top talent, thus improving institutional development and overall educational quality.

8. Chapter scheme

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research topic, outlining the significance of strategic human resource management (SHRM) practices in employee retention within Afghanistan's higher education sector. It introduces the research objectives, problem statement, research questions, and the scope of the study.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature and Conceptual Framework

This chapter presents an extensive review of existing literature on SHRM practices, employee retention, and related theories. It explores the role of key variables such as training, compensation, leadership, job satisfaction, and their impact on employee retention. Additionally, the chapter includes the development of the conceptual framework guiding the study. It also formulates the research hypotheses, which are derived from the theoretical insights and literature review, setting the foundation for the empirical analysis.

Chapter 3: Afghanistan Higher Education System: An Overview

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the higher education system in Afghanistan, discussing the structure, challenges, and recent developments. It highlights the critical role of faculty retention and the need for effective HRM strategies in Afghan universities.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the research design, sampling technique, data collection methods, and analytical tools used in the study. It explains the quantitative approach adopted, with a focus on structural equation modeling (SEM) and combined importance-performance map analysis (cIPMA).

Chapter 5: Strategic Human Resource Management Practices Related to Employee Retention Management: An Empirical Study

This chapter presents the results of the empirical analysis conducted using PLS-SEM and cIPMA. It explores the direct and indirect effects of SHRM practices on employee retention, with a focus on the mediating role of job satisfaction.

Chapter 6: Discussion, Summary of Findings, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This chapter discusses the key findings, comparing them with previous research, and presents the implications for HRM practices in Afghanistan higher education. It concludes with recommendations for policy makers and institutional leaders, along with suggestions for future research.

9. Major findings of the study

This section provides a summary of the study's key findings, including insights from the demographic profile of respondents, descriptive statistics, and the results of hypothesis testing for both direct and indirect effects. Additionally, the application of cIPMA highlights the importance and performance of strategic HRM practices in enhancing employee retention in Afghanistan's higher education institutions.

9.1 Findings based on demographic profile of respondents

- The overwhelming majority of respondents were male (90%), with only 10% female representation. This significant gender disparity reflects broader systemic barriers within Afghanistan's higher education sector that limit female participation.
- A large proportion of respondents (87.2%) were married, which suggests that faculty members might have significant family responsibilities, impacting their work-life balance and potentially influencing retention decisions.
- The majority of respondents (56.5%) were aged between 26 and 35 years, followed by 36.2% aged 36 to 45 years. This relatively young workforce suggests a potentially dynamic academic environment, yet it may also indicate challenges related to experience and institutional continuity.
- Most faculty members held a master's degree (59.9%), with 22.8% having a PhD. The relatively low number of PhD holders highlights a shortage of highly qualified faculty, which could impact the quality of education and research output in the institutions.
- Lower academic ranks dominate the respondent group, with 34.7% being Teaching Assistants and 30.1% Senior Teaching Assistants. The scarcity of higher-ranking faculty, such as professors (0.9%), reflects a critical gap in experienced leadership and mentorship within these institutions.

- Around 32.5% of respondents had between 6 to 10 years of experience, while only 0.9% had more than 20 years of experience. This suggests a workforce that is primarily mid-career, which could present challenges in terms of retaining institutional knowledge and expertise.
- Most faculty members (49.2%) earned between 31,000 and 40,000 Afghanis, with none earning above 60,000 Afghanis. The concentration of salaries in this lower range could affect job satisfaction and faculty retention, as the financial rewards are limited despite the challenges of academic work in Afghanistan.

9.2 Key findings based on descriptive analysis

- **Training and Development**: Respondents indicated moderate agreement on their institution's training and development efforts, with a mean score ranging from 3.33 to 3.45. The alignment of training programs with career goals was rated the highest but concerns about the sufficiency of resources for training were noted, indicating a need for improved resource allocation.
- **Compensation and Rewards**: Faculty members rated the fairness and competitiveness of the compensation system moderately, with mean values between 3.33 and 3.54. While transparency in compensation was acknowledged, perceptions of fairness compared to other institutions were less favourable, suggesting that improvements in pay equity could enhance job satisfaction.
- **Performance Appraisal**: The effectiveness of performance appraisals was moderately agreed upon, with scores ranging from 3.44 to 3.55. Constructive feedback and motivation through appraisals were viewed positively, but there was variability in how well career development opportunities were communicated, indicating room for improvement in these discussions.
- **Leadership**: Government leadership was rated moderately, with mean scores between 3.47 and 3.54. While respondents acknowledged efforts in policy fairness and government engagement with higher education institutions, there were concerns about the adequacy of leadership in addressing institutional challenges effectively.
- **Work-Life Balance**: The institution's support for work-life balance initiatives was moderately rated, with scores from 3.40 to 3.54. Although respondents recognized efforts to promote a healthy balance, some felt that personal well-being was not prioritized as much as productivity, highlighting a gap in support for work-life integration.

- **Job Satisfaction**: Faculty members reported moderate levels of job satisfaction, with mean scores ranging from 3.40 to 3.55. While satisfaction with the work environment and relationships with colleagues was relatively high, dissatisfaction was expressed regarding career advancement opportunities and salary growth, suggesting that these areas need further attention to enhance overall job satisfaction.
- **Employee Retention**: Employee retention scores indicated moderate intentions to stay, with mean values between 3.35 and 3.50. The majority of respondents expressed concerns about long-term job security and opportunities for professional development. Although there is a willingness to remain in their current positions, these retention challenges suggest that improvements in SHRM practices, such as compensation and growth opportunities, could help reduce turnover intentions.

9.3 Key findings based on hypothesis testing

- **H1**: Training and development significantly and positively affect job satisfaction. This hypothesis was supported, the study found that enhanced training not only increases satisfaction but also empowers employees to feel valued, making it a crucial factor for any HR strategy aimed at job fulfilment.
- **H2**: Training and development significantly and positively impact employee retention. This relationship was confirmed, showing that by investing in staff development, institutions foster loyalty, turning training into a retention powerhouse that directly combats turnover.
- **H3**: Compensation and rewards significantly and positively affect job satisfaction. The hypothesis was validated, suggesting that competitive compensation packages foster increased job satisfaction.
- **H4**: Compensation and rewards positively affect employee retention. This hypothesis was supported, revealing that fair compensation schemes encourage faculty to remain within their institutions. Competitive salaries not only reward current performance but act as anchors, preventing talent from seeking better opportunities elsewhere.
- **H5**: Performance appraisal significantly impacts job satisfaction. The findings confirmed this relationship, showing that regular and fair appraisals improve job satisfaction levels.

- **H6**: Performance Appraisal has significant effect on employee retention. The hypothesis was not supported, implying that while useful for development, appraisals alone don't ensure retention, signalling that additional factors like growth opportunities or incentives are crucial for keeping talent.
- **H7**: Leadership significantly affects job satisfaction. This hypothesis was supported, suggesting that strong leadership boosts job satisfaction.
- **H8**: Leadership positively affects employee retention. This hypothesis was confirmed, indicating that effective leadership is critical to retaining faculty members. underscoring the importance of vision and support in preventing attrition.
- **H9**: Work and life balance has a significant impact on job satisfaction. The hypothesis was supported, showing that a better work-life balance increases satisfaction.
- **H10**: Work and life balance significantly affects employee retention. This relationship was confirmed, demonstrating that Institutions that promote a balance between work and life see higher retention, proving that flexibility and care for employees' personal lives translate into long-term commitment.
- **H11**: Job satisfaction significantly influences employee retention. This hypothesis was supported, confirming that employees who are satisfied with their jobs are more likely to stay, making satisfaction the cornerstone of any retention strategy.
- **H12**: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between training and development and employee retention, the hypothesis was supported indicating that job satisfaction partly explains how training improves retention. Training boosts satisfaction, which in turn strengthens retention, showing that skill-building is a long-term investment in both morale and loyalty.
- **H13**: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between compensation and rewards and employee retention was significantly supported, demonstrating that fair compensation drives satisfaction, which leads to retention, reinforcing the idea that rewarding employees' efforts keeps them invested in the organization.
- **H14**: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between performance appraisal and employee Retention. The relationship was not supported, while appraisals improve

satisfaction, they do not directly translate into retention, suggesting that feedback without tangible rewards falls short of motivating long-term commitment.

- **H15**: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between leadership and employee retention, the hypothesis was accepted, indicating that leadership fosters satisfaction, which then improves retention, highlighting that great leadership is not only motivational but also foundational for retaining talent.

- **H16**: Job Satisfaction mediates the relationship between work and life balance and employee retention, the purposed hypothesis was accepted, work and life balance creates satisfaction, which leads to higher retention, demonstrating that respecting employees' personal time is key to keeping them in the long run.

9.4 Key findings based on cIPMA analysis

- Training and Development (TAD): High importance, moderate performance, and a significant necessary condition. TAD emerges as one of the most crucial factors for employee retention, with 18.237% of cases not meeting the necessary conditions. Despite its strong influence, current performance levels (60.324%) suggest that improvements in training and development programs are essential for boosting retention, making it a top priority for institutions.

- Compensation and Rewards (CAR): Important and relatively well-managed, yet still critical. While CAR shows high importance (0.239) and performs relatively well (60.787%), it remains a necessary condition for retention. However, with only 2.736% of cases falling short, it indicates that, although well-handled, fine-tuning compensation structures can further enhance retention efforts.

- Performance Appraisal (PFA): Low importance and over-performing, not a necessary condition. With low importance (0.047) and high performance (62.574%), PFA is not a crucial driver for retention. It is not a necessary condition (only 0.912% of cases unmet), suggesting that while appraisals contribute to satisfaction, they do not directly impact retention, thus requiring minimal immediate focus.

- Leadership (LDP): Moderate importance, high performance, and not a critical necessity. Leadership shows moderate importance (0.199) and decent performance (62.491%), with 7.295% of cases not meeting the required levels. Despite its role in

shaping satisfaction, it is not a necessary condition for retention, making it less of a priority in comparison to other constructs like TAD and WLB.

- Work and Life Balance (WLB): Essential and moderately performing, high priority for retention. WLB displays strong importance (0.235) and moderate performance (61.268%), with 14.59% of cases not meeting the necessary condition. Institutions need to improve work-life balance policies, as this construct plays a vital role in retaining employees, underscoring its strategic importance.
- Job Satisfaction (JBS): Highly important, strong performance, but with gaps. Job satisfaction is a key factor with high importance (0.205) and performance (63.314%). However, 19.757% of cases do not meet the necessary conditions, signalling that institutions must prioritize job satisfaction to ensure successful retention strategies. Without addressing this, efforts to improve other areas may be less effective.

In conclusion, Training and Development, Compensation and Rewards, Work-Life Balance, and Job Satisfaction should be prioritized, as they show high importance and remain critical for improving employee retention. On the other hand, Performance Appraisal and Leadership, while performing adequately, do not require immediate attention as they do not emerge as necessary conditions for retention.

10. Data Analysis, measurement model and structural model

In recent years, the increasing importance of employee retention has become a critical concern for higher education institutions, particularly in the context of Afghanistan. As universities face challenges related to retaining qualified faculty members, the quality and level of qualification among academic staff have emerged as significant issues. Ensuring that institutions maintain a skilled and motivated workforce is essential for improving the overall quality of education and institutional performance. This study focuses on examining how (SHRM) practices impact employee retention through the mediating role of job satisfaction.

This study analyzes the empirical data collected from academic staff in Afghanistan's public higher education institutions, testing the relationships between SHRM practices, job satisfaction, and employee retention. The hypotheses purposed are tested using structural equation modeling to evaluate the direct and indirect effects of the examined variables.

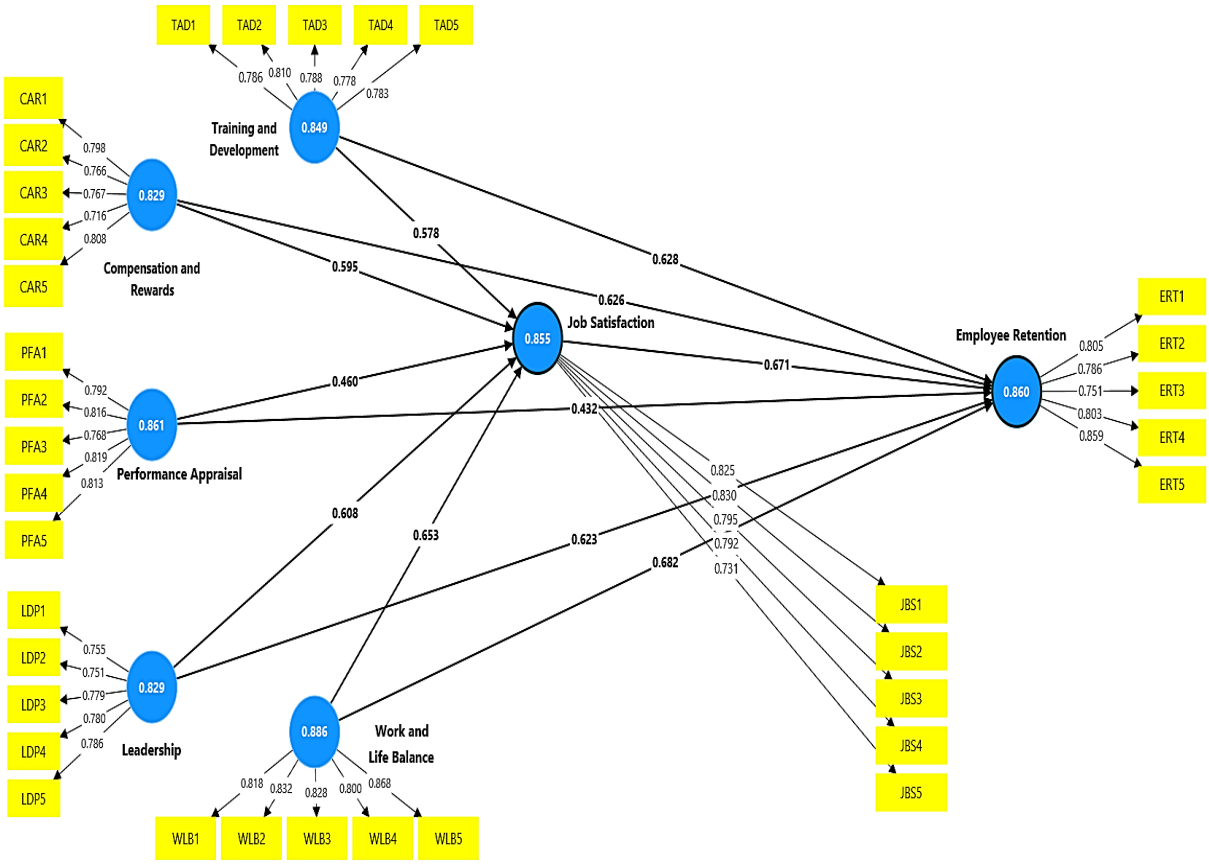
To investigate the relationships between the constructs in this study, a two-step process was employed for assessing the PLS-SEM path model, as recommended by (Henseler et al., 2009).

The two-step process involves evaluating both the measurement model and the structural model. The measurement model assesses the reliability and validity of the constructs, while the structural model evaluates the relationships between the latent constructs (Hair et al., 2012, 2014).

10.1 Assessment of measurement model

In assessing the measurement model, it is essential to evaluate several key metrics to ensure the reliability and validity of the constructs. According to Henseler et al. (2009) and Hair et al. (2020, 2022), the assessment involves determining individual item reliability, internal consistency reliability, content validity, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

Figure 2 The measurement model



Source: Smart-pls 4.0

The first step in assessing a reflective measurement model involves evaluating the indicator loadings. Hair et al. (2022), an indicator loading above **0.708** signifies satisfactory item reliability, as this threshold suggests that the indicator explains at least 50% of the variance in the underlying construct. If an indicator falls below this threshold, it should be removed if doing so improves internal consistency reliability or convergent validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

Ringle & Sarstedt, (2016) also emphasized the importance of positive outer weights, especially when employing Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA). Positive outer weights are crucial because they indicate that the indicators meaningfully contribute to their respective constructs. Non-positive outer weights may suggest misalignment with the underlying construct, potentially leading to inaccurate IPMA results.

Internal consistency reliability is a critical component in assessing the measurement model, ensuring that all indicators measuring a construct are closely related and reflect the same underlying concept (Bijttebier et al., 2000; Sun et al., 2007). The recommended threshold for all reliability measures, including Cronbach's Alpha (α), Composite Reliability(ρ_A), and the reliability coefficient (ρ_C), is 0.70 or higher, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. However, values exceeding 0.95 may suggest redundancy among indicators, potentially posing issues for the model's validity (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Hair et al., 2020). In this study as it is presented in Table 4 all constructs demonstrated internal consistency reliability, with values comfortably exceeding the 0.70 threshold, ensuring that the items reliably measure their respective constructs without redundancy or over-saturation.

The third step of measurement model assessment is establishing convergent validity. To assess convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is typically used. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), an AVE value of 0.50 or higher suggests that a construct explains at least 50% of the variance in its indicators, which is considered acceptable for demonstrating convergent validity. The AVE values for each construct are presented in Table 6, further affirming the robustness of the measurement model.

Table 6 Factor loading, outer weights, reliability and convergent validity

Construct	Item	Loading	Outer weights	α	ρ_A	ρ_C	AVE
Training and Development	TAD1	0.786	0.267	0.849	0.850	0.892	0.623
	TAD2	0.810	0.264				
	TAD3	0.788	0.253				
	TAD4	0.778	0.232				
	TAD5	0.783	0.251				
Compensation and Rewards	CAR1	0.798	0.270	0.829	0.830	0.880	0.595
	CAR2	0.766	0.258				
	CAR3	0.767	0.260				
	CAR4	0.716	0.252				
	CAR5	0.808	0.257				
	PFA1	0.792	0.269	0.861	0.864	0.900	0.643

	PFA2	0.816	0.243				
Performance	PFA3	0.768	0.220				
Appraisal	PFA4	0.819	0.255				
	PFA5	0.813	0.259				
Leadership	LDP1	0.755	0.254	0.829	0.830	0.880	0.594
	LDP2	0.751	0.247				
	LDP3	0.779	0.262				
	LDP4	0.780	0.259				
	LDP5	0.786	0.275				
Work and Life	WLB1	0.818	0.220	0.886	0.888	0.917	0.688
Balance	WLB2	0.832	0.251				
	WLB3	0.828	0.248				
	WLB4	0.800	0.244				
	WLB5	0.868	0.242				
Job	JBS1	0.825	0.234	0.855	0.856	0.896	0.633
Satisfaction	JBS2	0.830	0.266				
	JBS3	0.795	0.237				
	JBS4	0.792	0.233				
	JBS5	0.731	0.291				
Employee	ERT1	0.805	0.260	0.860	0.862	0.900	0.643
Retention	ERT2	0.786	0.239				
	ERT3	0.751	0.247				
	ERT4	0.803	0.236				
	ERT5	0.859	0.265				

Notes: α: Cronbach's alpha; ρ_A: reliability coefficient; ρ_C composite reliability; AVE: average variance extracted
Source: Table by researcher

Discriminant validity is a crucial component of construct validity that ensures each latent variable in a model is distinct and captures phenomena not represented by other constructs. According to Hair et al. (2022), there are three commonly used methods for assessing discriminant validity: Fornell-Larcker Criterion, Cross Loadings, and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). Each method provides insights into how well constructs are differentiated from one another.

The Fornell-Larcker Criterion is one of the most widely used approaches for assessing discriminant validity. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), this method compares the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct with the correlations between that construct and all other constructs. Discriminant validity is established if the square root of a construct's AVE is greater than its correlations with other constructs. This implies that a construct shares more variance with its own indicators than with any other latent variable in the model.

The HTMT ratio is a more recent method for assessing discriminant validity, developed by (Henseler et al., 2015). It is based on the multitrait-multimethod matrix and compares the ratio of between-construct correlations to within-construct correlations. Discriminant validity is established if the HTMT value is below a specific threshold, typically 0.90 for conceptually similar constructs or 0.85 for more distinct constructs. An HTMT value above these thresholds indicates that the constructs may not be sufficiently distinct. The Fornell-Larcker Criterion and HTMT results are presented in Table 7 and 8, confirming that the constructs are distinct from one another.

Table 7 Discriminant validity by Fornell-Larcker criterion

Construct	TAD	CAR	PFA	LDP	WLB	JBS	ERT
TAD	***0.789***						
CAR	0.496	***0.772***					
PFA	0.415	0.419	***0.802***				
LDP	0.497	0.530	0.396	***0.770***			
WLB	0.616	0.595	0.444	0.664	***0.829***		
JBS	0.578	0.595	0.460	0.608	0.653	***0.795***	
ERT	0.628	0.626	0.432	0.623	0.682	0.671	***0.802***

Source: Table by researcher

Note: TAD: training and development, CAR: compensation and rewards, PFA: performance appraisal, LDP: leadership, WLB: work and life balance, JBS: job satisfaction, ERT: employee retention. *: The diagonal elements, shown in bold and italics, represent the square root of the AVE, while the values below the diagonal indicate the correlations between each construct and the other constructs, illustrating the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Table 8 Discriminant validity by HTMT

Construct	TAD	CAR	PFA	LDP	WLB	JBS	ERT
TAD							
CAR	0.590						
PFA	0.485	0.492					
LDP	0.593	0.640	0.470				
WLB	0.709	0.693	0.505	0.775			
JBS	0.668	0.699	0.527	0.713	0.737		
ERT	0.733	0.740	0.497	0.737	0.779	0.776	

Source: Table by researcher

Note: The empty cells in the table represent the absence of correlations within the construct themselves, as HTMT only measures discriminant validity for pairs of distinct constructs.

By applying all these methods this study ensures a thorough assessment of measurement model and confirming that the reliability and validity is established indicating that latent variables in the model are conceptually distinct and not overlapping.

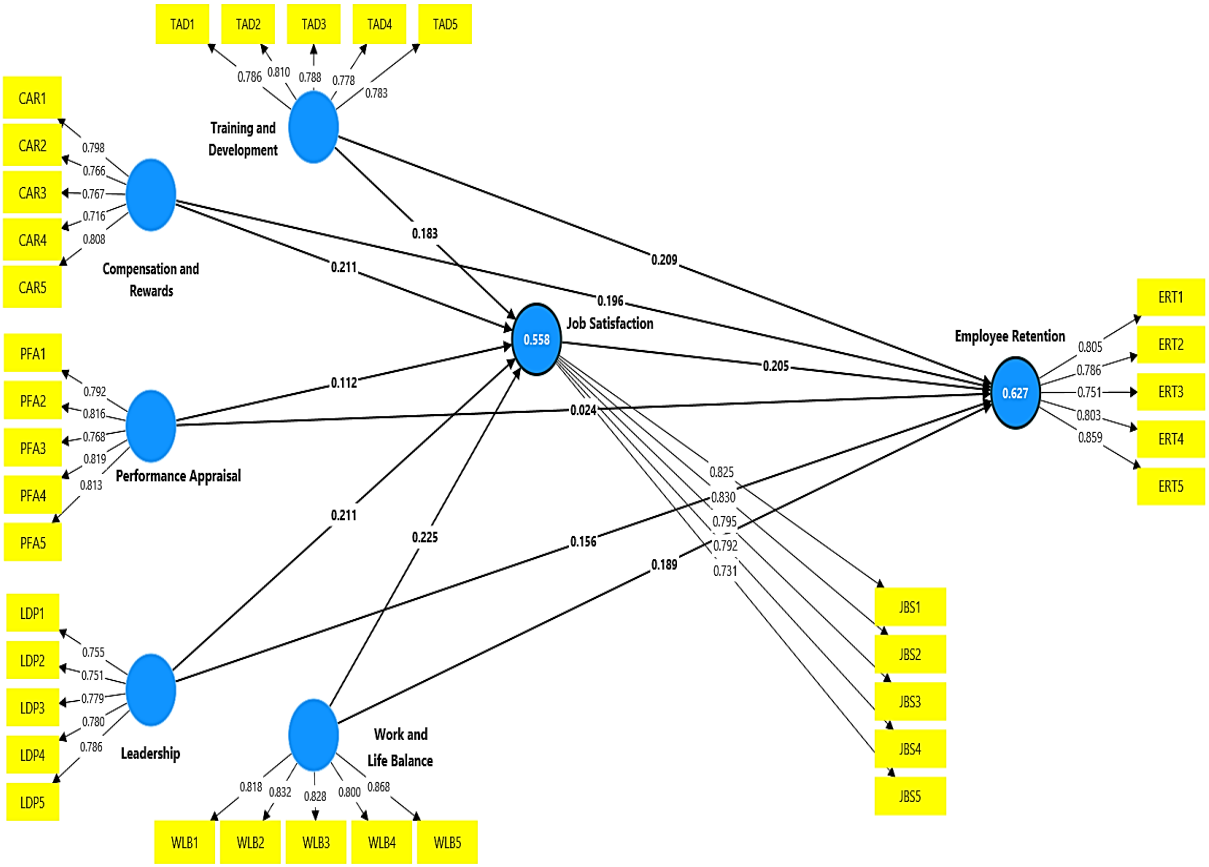
10.2 Assessment of structural model

After confirming that the measurement model is both reliable and valid, the next crucial step is to assess the structural model. The structural model in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) refers to the relationship between latent variables or constructs that are identified in the research. While the measurement model focuses on the reliability and validity of indicators used to measure the constructs, the structural model evaluates the hypothesized relationships between these constructs. Essentially, the structural model reflects the relationships between independent (exogenous) and dependent (endogenous) variables, which allows researchers to test the framework of their study (Hair et al., 2019).

In the context of this study, assessing the structural model can reveal the direct and indirect effects of SHRM practices on retention, providing insight into the strength and significance of these relationships. By evaluating the structural model, researchers can not only confirm whether the proposed relationships hold true but also gauge the extent to which the independent variables explain the variance in the dependent variable (Sarstedt et al., 2022). which in this study is employee retention among faculty members in Afghanistan's public higher education institutions.

Before evaluating the results of the structural model, several preliminary steps must be taken to ensure the robustness of the analysis. These include testing for collinearity issues, examining the R^2 values of endogenous constructs, assessing the effect size (f^2), and determining the model's predictive relevance (Q^2).

Figure 3 The structural model



Source: Smart PLS 4.0

The first step before assessing the path coefficients of the structural model is to check for potential collinearity issues. Collinearity occurs when two or more predictor constructs are highly correlated, which can distort the results of the regression analysis and compromise the validity of the path coefficients (Kock & Lynn, 2012). To assess collinearity, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for each set of predictor constructs must be examined. As a rule of thumb, VIF values should be below 5, although some authors suggest a more conservative threshold of 3 (Hair et al., 2019). The results presented in Table 9 indicate that there is no collinearity issues exist between constructs as the VIF values are well below that the conservative threshold of 3.

Table 9 Results of multicollinearity for inner model

Inner Model	
Relationship	**Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)**
Training and development -> Job Satisfaction	1.744
Training and development -> Employee Retention	1.819
Compensation and Rewards -> Job Satisfaction	1.728
Compensation and Rewards -> Employee Retention	1.829
Performance Appraisal -> Job Satisfaction	1.353
Performance Appraisal -> Employee Retention	1.381
Leadership -> Job Satisfaction	1.923
Leadership -> Employee Retention	2.024
Work and Life Balance -> Job Satisfaction	2.451
Work and Life Balance -> Employee Retention	2.566
Job Satisfaction -> Employee Retention	2.263

Source: Table by researcher

After ensuring no collinearity issues exist, the R^2 values of the endogenous constructs should be examined. The R^2 value represents the proportion of variance in an endogenous variable explained by its predictor variables and is a key indicator of the model's explanatory power (Hair et al., 2019). While there are no strict thresholds, R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 are often considered substantial, moderate, and weak, respectively (Cohen, 1988). The result of coefficient of determination presented in Table 10, indicates that the R^2 value for Job Satisfaction is 0.558, meaning that 55.8% of the variance in Job Satisfaction is explained by the predictor variables. Similarly, Employee Retention has an R^2 of 0.627, suggesting that 62.7% of the variance is explained by the independent constructs.

Another critical aspect of structural model assessment is evaluating the model's predictive relevance (Q^2) using the blindfolding procedure. Q^2 is used to assess how well the model predicts the data points of the endogenous constructs. Hair et al. (2019), recommended that this technique should be applied only to endogenous variables with reflective measurement models. A Q^2 value greater than zero indicates that the model has predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2022). In this study, assessing Q^2 values will confirm whether the SHRM practices provide adequate predictions of employee retention in the context of Afghanistan's higher education institutions. The Q^2 values presented in the Table 10, indicate the predictive relevance of the model for the endogenous constructs. A Q^2 value above 0 suggests that the model has predictive relevance. Job Satisfaction has a Q^2 value of 0.535, and Employee Retention has a Q^2 of 0.592, both demonstrating that the model has good predictive relevance for unseen data for these constructs.

Table 10 Coefficients of determination (R^2) and Q^2 for endogenous constructs

Endogenous Construct	R Square (R^2)	R Square (R^2) Adjusted	Q Square (Q^2) Predict
Job Satisfaction	0.558	0.551	0.535
Employee Retention	0.627	0.621	0.592

Source: Table by researcher
Note: R^2 adjusted value adjusts the R^2 to account for the number of predictors, providing a more accurate measure by penalizing the inclusion of unnecessary variables.

The next step involves assessing the effect size (f^2), which measures the change in the R^2 value when a specific predictor variable is removed from the model. It helps determine whether the predictor construct has a substantive impact on the endogenous construct (Chin, 1998). According to Cohen (1988), effect sizes can be interpreted as small (0.02), medium (0.15), or large (0.35). The Table 11 displays the effect sizes (f^2) for the relationships between various constructs. In this study, most relationships exhibit small effect sizes.

Table 11 Effect sizes (f^2) of relationships between constructs

Relationships	Effect Size (f^2)
TAD -> JBS	0.049
TAD -> ERT	0.070
CAR -> JBS	0.063
CAR -> ERT	0.062
PFA -> JBS	0.026
PFA -> ERT	0.005
LDP -> JBS	0.060
LDP -> ERT	0.039
WLB -> JBS	0.053
WLB -> ERT	0.045
JBS -> ERT	0.054

Source: Table by researcher
Note: TAD: training and development, CAR: compensation and rewards, PFA: performance appraisal, LDP: leadership, WLB: work and life balance, JBS: job satisfaction, ERT: employee retention.

While PLS-SEM is primarily focused on maximizing the explained variance (R^2) and testing the predictive relevance of models, assessing the overall model fit is an additional important step in structural model evaluation. One of the most widely used measures of model fit in PLS-SEM is the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), which measures the difference between the observed correlation matrix and the predicted correlation matrix. An SRMR value of 0.08 or below is generally considered a good fit, indicating that the model reproduces the empirical data well (Henseler et al., 2014).

Another model fit criterion in PLS-SEM is the Normed Fit Index (NFI), which compares the model's chi-square value against a null model. NFI values above 0.90 are generally considered adequate, though higher values (closer to 1) indicate better model fit (Hair et al., 2019). Another measure, the Goodness-of-Fit (GoF), was developed to assess the global fit of the PLS-SEM model, taking both the outer model and the structural model into account (Tenenhaus et al., 2005). (Tenenhaus et al., 2005). It is calculated as the geometric mean of the average variance extracted (AVE) for the latent variables and the R^2 of the endogenous variables.

Generally, GoF values of 0.10, 0.25, and 0.36 represent small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively (Wetzels et al., 2009). The Table 12 presents key model fit indices for the structural model. The SRMR value of 0.043 is well below the recommended threshold of 0.08, indicating a strong fit between the observed and predicted data. The NFI value of 0.839 is slightly below the ideal threshold of 0.90, suggesting a moderate fit. However, the GoF value of 0.617 indicates a substantial model fit, demonstrating that the overall model captures a significant portion of the data's variance.

Table 12 Model fit metrics for the structural model

Fit Metric	Value
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	0.043
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0.839
Goodness-of-Fit (GoF)	0.617

Source: Table by researcher

In PLS-SEM, the path coefficients represent the strength and direction of the relationships between the constructs in the structural model. These coefficients typically range between -1 and +1, where values closer to +1 indicate a strong positive relationship, and values closer to -1 indicate a strong negative relationship (Hair et al., 2019). However, the magnitude of the path coefficient alone is not sufficient to determine the significance of the relationship. Therefore, further testing is required to assess the statistical significance of these path coefficients.

The significance of the path coefficients is tested using bootstrapping, a non-parametric resampling technique in PLS-SEM. The standard error derived from bootstrapping enables the calculation of t-values and p-values for hypothesis testing. According to Walpole et al. (2007), the t-value helps assess whether the path coefficient is statistically significant. Common critical values for t in a two-tailed test are 1.65 (significance level of 10%), 1.96 (significance level of 5%), and 2.57 (significance level of 1%). Furthermore, the p-value is another critical measure

for significance. As per Fisz (1963), a p-value less than 0.05 is generally accepted as statistically significant for a 5% significance level, and a p-value less than 0.01 signifies significance at a 1% level. In this study, p-values less than 0.05 will be considered statistically significant.

10.2.1 Hypothesis testing (direct effect)

The direct effects of the hypothesized relationships between strategic human resource management practices and outcomes such as employee retention and job satisfaction are examined in this analysis. Path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values obtained from bootstrapping provide insights into the significance and strength of these relationships. The hypothesis results in Table 13 presents the path coefficients (β), standard deviations (SD), t-statistics, and p-values for the hypothesized relationships between constructs in the structural model, indicating whether each hypothesis is supported based on significance testing. The interpretation of hypotheses is as follow:

- H1 evaluates whether training and development significantly and positively affects job satisfaction. The results show that TAD has a significant and positive impact on JBS ($\beta = 0.183$, $t = 3.004$, $p = 0.003$). Hence, H1 is supported.
- H2 examines whether training and development significantly and positively affects employee retention. The findings indicate that TAD has a significant and positive effect on ERT ($\beta = 0.209$, $t = 3.534$, $p < 0.001$). Hence, H2 is supported.
- H3 assesses whether compensation and rewards significantly and positively affects job satisfaction. The results indicate that CAR has a significant and positive influence on JBS ($\beta = 0.211$, $t = 4.009$, $p < 0.001$). Hence, H3 is supported.
- H4 evaluates whether compensation and rewards significantly and positively affect employee retention. The results reveal that CAR positively impacts ERT ($\beta = 0.196$, $t = 3.701$, $p < 0.001$). Hence, H4 is supported.
- H5 examines whether performance appraisal significantly and positively affects job satisfaction. The findings show that PFA has a significant impact on JBS ($\beta = 0.112$, $t = 2.179$, $p = 0.029$). Hence, H5 is supported.
- H6 tests whether performance appraisal significantly and positively affects employee retention (ERT). The results demonstrate that PFA has an insignificant impact on ERT ($\beta = 0.024$, $t = 0.563$, $p = 0.574$). Hence, H6 is not supported.

- H7 evaluates whether leadership significantly and positively affects job satisfaction. The results reveal that LDP has a significant and positive effect on JBS (β = 0.211, t = 3.088, p = 0.002). Hence, H7 is supported.
- H8 examines whether leadership significantly and positively affects employee retention. The results indicate that LDP has a significant and positive impact on ERT (β = 0.156, t = 2.500, p = 0.012). Hence, H8 is supported.
- H9 assesses whether work and life balance significantly and positively affect job satisfaction. The findings show that WLB has a significant impact on JBS (β = 0.225, t = 2.916, p = 0.004). Hence, H9 is supported.
- H10 evaluates whether work and life balance significantly and positively affect employee retention. The results reveal that WLB has a significant and positive impact on ERT (β = 0.189, t = 2.540, p = 0.011). Hence, H10 is supported.
- H11 examines whether job satisfaction significantly and positively affects employee retention. The results show that JBS has a significant and positive effect on ERT (β = 0.205, t = 3.216, p = 0.001). Hence, H11 is supported.

Table 13 Hypothesis testing results for direct relationships

No	Hypothesis	B	SD	T stat	P values	Results
H1	TAD -> JBS	0.183	0.061	3.004	0.003	Supported
H2	TAD -> ERT	0.209	0.059	3.534	0.000	Supported
H3	CAR -> JBS	0.211	0.053	4.009	0.000	Supported
H4	CAR -> ERT	0.196	0.053	3.701	0.000	Supported
H5	PFA -> JBS	0.112	0.051	2.179	0.029	Supported
H6	PFA -> ERT	0.024	0.042	0.563	0.574	Not Supported
H7	LDP -> JBS	0.211	0.068	3.088	0.002	Supported
H8	LDP -> ERT	0.156	0.062	2.500	0.012	Supported
H9	WLB -> JBS	0.225	0.077	2.916	0.004	Supported
H10	WLB -> ERT	0.189	0.074	2.540	0.011	Supported
H11	JBS -> ERT	0.205	0.064	3.216	0.001	Supported

Source: Table by researcher
Note: β: path coefficient, SD: standard deviation, T stat: t statistics, P value: probability value TAD: training and development, CAR: compensation and rewards, PFA: performance appraisal, LDP: leadership, WLB: work and life balance, JBS: job satisfaction, ERT: employee retention.

10.2.2 Hypothesis testing (mediating or indirect effect)

In structural equation modeling, the mediating or indirect effect occurs when the relationship between an independent variable (IV) and a dependent variable (DV) is transmitted through a third variable known as the mediator (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The role of mediation is to

explain the underlying mechanism or process through which an independent variable influences a dependent variable, offering deeper insights into how the effects are transmitted. Mediation is an important aspect in SEM as it can reveal both direct and indirect pathways through which variables interact in a model.

There are two main types of mediation, depending on how the inclusion of the mediator influences the direct effect:

- Full Mediation: This occurs when the inclusion of the mediator completely accounts for the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Zhao et al., 2010).
- Partial Mediation: Partial mediation occurs when the mediator accounts for part, but not all, of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Hair et al., 2019).

The mediating effects of the hypothesized relationships between strategic human resource management (SHRM) practices and outcomes, such as employee retention and job satisfaction, are explored in this section. Mediation analysis investigates whether job satisfaction mediates the relationship between SHRM practices and employee retention. The results of the mediation hypothesis testing are summarized in Table 14. These results offer valuable insights into whether job satisfaction serves as a significant mediator in the relationship between SHRM practices and employee retention, shedding light on how these practices contribute to retention outcomes in Afghanistan's public higher education institutions. The interpretation of hypotheses is as follow:

- H12 examines whether job satisfaction mediates the relationship between training and development and employee retention. The results indicate that the indirect effect of TAD on ERT through JBS is statistically significant ($\beta = 0.037$, $t = 2.083$, $p = 0.037$). Therefore, H12 is supported, suggesting a partial mediation.
- H13 evaluates whether job satisfaction mediates the relationship between compensation and rewards and employee retention. The findings reveal a significant indirect effect ($\beta = 0.043$, $t = 2.429$, $p = 0.015$). This supports H13, indicating a partial mediation.
- H14 tests whether job satisfaction mediates the relationship between performance appraisal and employee retention. The results show that the mediation effect is not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.023$, $t = 1.768$, $p = 0.077$). Hence, H14 is not supported, indicating a full mediation.

- H15 assesses whether job satisfaction mediates the relationship between leadership and employee retention. The results demonstrate a significant indirect effect (β = 0.043, t = 2.406, p = 0.016), supporting H15. This suggests a partial mediation.
- H16 evaluates whether job satisfaction mediates the relationship between work and life balance and employee retention. The findings indicate that the indirect effect is statistically significant (β = 0.046, t = 2.052, p = 0.040), thus supporting H16. This result highlights a partial mediation.

Table 14 Hypothesis testing results for indirect relationships

No	Hypothesis	β	SD	T stat	P values	Results	Type of Mediation
H12	TAD -> JBS -> ERT	0.037	0.018	2.083	0.037	Supported	Partial
H13	CAR -> JBS -> ERT	0.043	0.018	2.429	0.015	Supported	Partial
H14	PFA -> JBS -> ERT	0.023	0.013	1.768	0.077	Not Supported	Full
H15	LDP -> JBS -> ERT	0.043	0.018	2.406	0.016	Supported	Partial
H16	WLB -> JBS ->ERT	0.046	0.022	2.052	0.040	Supported	Partial

Source: Table by researcher
Note: β: path coefficient, SD: standard deviation, T stat: t statistics, P value: probability value TAD: training and development, CAR: compensation and rewards, PFA: performance appraisal, LDP: leadership, WLB: work and life balance, JBS: job satisfaction, ERT: employee retention.

11. IPMA and NCA analysis

Importance Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) was initially developed as a tool for enhancing decision-making processes by evaluating both the importance and performance of factors that influence key outcomes (Martilla & James, 1977). IPMA is an analytical tool within Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) that combines the measurement of both the importance (total effect) and the performance (average score) of latent variables. Traditionally used in marketing and management studies, IPMA helps researchers or managers prioritize actions by showing which factors (constructs) are both important for an outcome but underperforming, therefore requiring attention (Ringle and Sarstedt, 2016).

- Importance (Total Effect): Refers to the strength of the relationship between the predictor variable (e.g., leadership, compensation) and the outcome (e.g., employee retention). High importance indicates a strong influence on the outcome.
- Performance (Mean Value): Reflects how well a predictor performs on a scale relative to a specific benchmark or average. For example, if an institution's leadership receives a low performance score, it implies that leadership is not perceived to be functioning optimally (Garson, 2016).

Necessary Condition analysis (NCA), introduced by (Dul, 2016), is a relatively newer method compared to IPMA. NCA is based on the premise that certain conditions are necessary for an outcome to occur. These necessary conditions do not guarantee the outcome by themselves, but without them, the desired outcome cannot happen.

The concepts of necessity and sufficiency, while often confused, are distinct and play different roles in causality (Goertz & Starr, 2008). A necessary cause is one that must be present for an outcome to occur; without it, the outcome is impossible. However, a necessary cause alone does not guarantee the outcome. In essence, necessary causes act as barriers, bottlenecks or constraints, while sufficient causes are capable of driving the outcome on their own, but neither can replace the other. Both play a critical role in understanding causal logic and improving decision-making (Richter et al., 2020).

Unlike traditional regression approaches, NCA emphasizes identifying conditions that are strictly necessary for achieving desired results, thus providing valuable insights into the limits of causal relationships. NCA examines the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable by establishing a threshold value that delineates the necessary conditions for the outcome to manifest (Dul et al., 2023).

- Ceiling Line (NCA Concept): The core of NCA is the ceiling line, which determines the boundary between the absence and presence of the necessary condition. If performance on a necessary condition crosses the ceiling line, the probability of the outcome increases.
- Effect Size in NCA: NCA also measures the effect size of necessary conditions, indicating how strongly the absence of the condition affects the outcome. Larger effect sizes suggest a condition is more crucial (Richter et al., 2020).

12. Combined importance-performance map analysis (cIPMA)

cIPMA merges the principles of IPMA and NCA to provide a holistic view of both sufficient (IPMA) and necessary (NCA) conditions. This combination offers a richer interpretation of the drivers of an outcome. This method merges the concepts of sufficiency and necessity to provide a deeper analysis of the factors influencing a particular outcome

In the papers by Hauff et al. (2024) and Sarstedt et al. (2024), cIPMA is presented as a novel method in SEM analysis, especially within the context of structural equation modeling. By utilizing cIPMA, researchers can go beyond simply identifying important factors and instead

understand the necessary preconditions for outcomes like employee retention or job satisfaction. This dual-layered approach helps prioritize actions more effectively. For example, while leadership might be an important driver of employee retention, cIPMA might show that job satisfaction is a necessary condition that needs to be met first before leadership interventions will be effective.

Against this background, the study applied the Combined Importance-Performance Map Analysis (cIPMA) to draw deeper insights into the relationship between strategic human resource management practices and employee retention. By using cIPMA, the study not only evaluates which SHRM practices are critical for improving employee retention in Afghanistan's public higher education institutions but also identifies those that require managerial attention to enhance their performance. This approach provides practical implications for decision-makers to prioritize resource allocation in areas that can yield the most significant improvements in faculty retention, addressing both sufficiency and necessity logic within the institutional context.

Once the key requirements for running IPMA were fulfilled, including rescaling the latent variable scores and ensuring all indicator scales were consistent, the IPMA analysis was performed for employee retention, the study's final target construct. According to Sarstedt et al. (2024), selecting a key target construct is critical as it allows the researcher to evaluate which factors (exogenous constructs) contribute most significantly to the outcome, in this case, employee retention.

The cIPMA analysis was conducted for employee retention (ERT), the study's final target construct. This technique helps identify antecedent variables that strongly influence retention and have potential for improvement. The IPMA results highlight the total effects of constructs such as Training and Development (0.247), Compensation and Rewards (0.239), Work and Life Balance (0.235), Leadership (0.199), and Job Satisfaction (0.205) on employee retention. Training and Development, Compensation and Rewards, and Work and Life Balance were identified as high-importance factors with moderate performance scores (60.324–61.268). Leadership, while moderately important, has a lower effect on retention, and Performance Appraisal shows the least importance (0.047), with its influence on retention being statistically insignificant.

The NCA results revealed that Compensation and Rewards had the highest necessity effect size (d = 0.161), making it a crucial factor for ensuring employee retention. Training and Development (d = 0.145) and Job Satisfaction (d = 0.147) also demonstrated substantial necessity effects, highlighting their significant influence on retention. In contrast, Leadership (d = 0.085) and Performance Appraisal (d = 0.093) had lower effect sizes, indicating that they are not necessary conditions for retention.

Creating bottleneck tables is a critical part of Necessary Condition Analysis, offering actionable insights into how various constructs must perform to meet a specific target. A bottleneck is a condition that constrains the outcome; in this case, for example, bottleneck tables show what level of factors like leadership, job satisfaction, and training must be met to achieve employee retention. According to Dul (2016), bottleneck tables provide a way to translate theoretical findings into practical, actionable benchmarks for performance improvement, which is invaluable for organizational settings where specific targets, like employee retention, are vital.

To generate bottleneck tables, the NCA technique first analyzes scatter plots to detect "empty spaces" between two variables indicating whether a condition is necessary for achieving a certain level of the target outcome. This is followed by establishing ceiling lines (CE-FDH) to define the boundary where the necessary condition lies. For example, the CE-FDH ceiling line would represent a stepwise trend identifying the minimum level of a condition (e.g., work-life balance) required to meet the set target (e.g., 85% employee retention). Effect size (d) plays a crucial role in identifying whether a condition is necessary. Hauff et al. (2024) emphasize that the selection of a higher target (such as 85%) is useful for identifying stringent bottlenecks, revealing necessary conditions that must be met to achieve such high levels of performance or retention. The bottleneck table (Table 15) highlights the percentage of cases that do not meet the required conditions for each exogenous construct to reach the 85% target for employee retention.

Table 15 Bottleneck table for employee retention actual Values and Percentiles for exogenous constructs based on rescaled PLS-SEM scores (0-100)

ERT Actual Values	TAD	CAR	PFA	LDP	WLB	JBS
0.00%	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
5.00%	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

10.00%	0.000	0.304	0.608	0.000	0.304	0.000
15.00%	0.000	0.304	0.608	0.000	0.304	0.000
20.00%	0.912	0.304	0.608	0.304	0.608	0.304
25.00%	0.912	0.304	0.608	0.304	0.608	0.304
30.00%	0.912	0.304	0.608	0.304	0.608	0.304
35.00%	0.912	0.304	0.912	0.912	0.608	0.304
40.00%	0.912	0.304	0.912	0.912	0.912	0.304
45.00%	4.863	2.736	0.912	0.912	1.824	0.304
50.00%	4.863	2.736	0.912	0.912	5.167	1.216
55.00%	4.863	2.736	0.912	0.912	5.167	1.216
60.00%	4.863	2.736	0.912	0.912	11.246	15.805
65.00%	4.863	2.736	0.912	0.912	11.246	17.629
70.00%	8.207	2.736	0.912	0.912	11.246	18.845
75.00%	8.207	2.736	0.912	7.295	14.590	19.757
80.00%	18.237	2.736	0.912	7.295	14.590	19.757
85.00%	18.237	2.736	0.912	7.295	14.590	19.757
90.00%	18.237	6.079	18.845	7.295	14.590	22.492
95.00%	43.161	6.079	25.228	13.982	14.590	22.492
100.00%	52.888	84.195	36.778	63.222	97.568	92.401

Source: Table by researcher

The combined results of IPMA and NCA, summarized in Table 16, provide a comprehensive view of the importance, performance, percentage of cases not meeting the necessary conditions which are taken from bottleneck table, and necessity effect sizes for each construct, identifying where performance improvements are essential to achieve the desired retention outcomes.

Table 16 Combined result of IPMA and NCA

Antecedent Construct	**Importance**	**Performance**	**%CNN**	**d**	**P value**
Training and Development	0.247	60.324	18.237	0.145	0.000
Compensation and Rewards	0.239	60.787	2.736	0.161	0.003
Performance Appraisal	0.047	62.574	0.912	0.093	0.001
Leadership	0.199	62.491	7.295	0.085	0.001
Work and Life Balance	0.235	61.268	14.59	0.120	0.000
Job Satisfaction	0.205	63.314	19.757	0.147	0.000

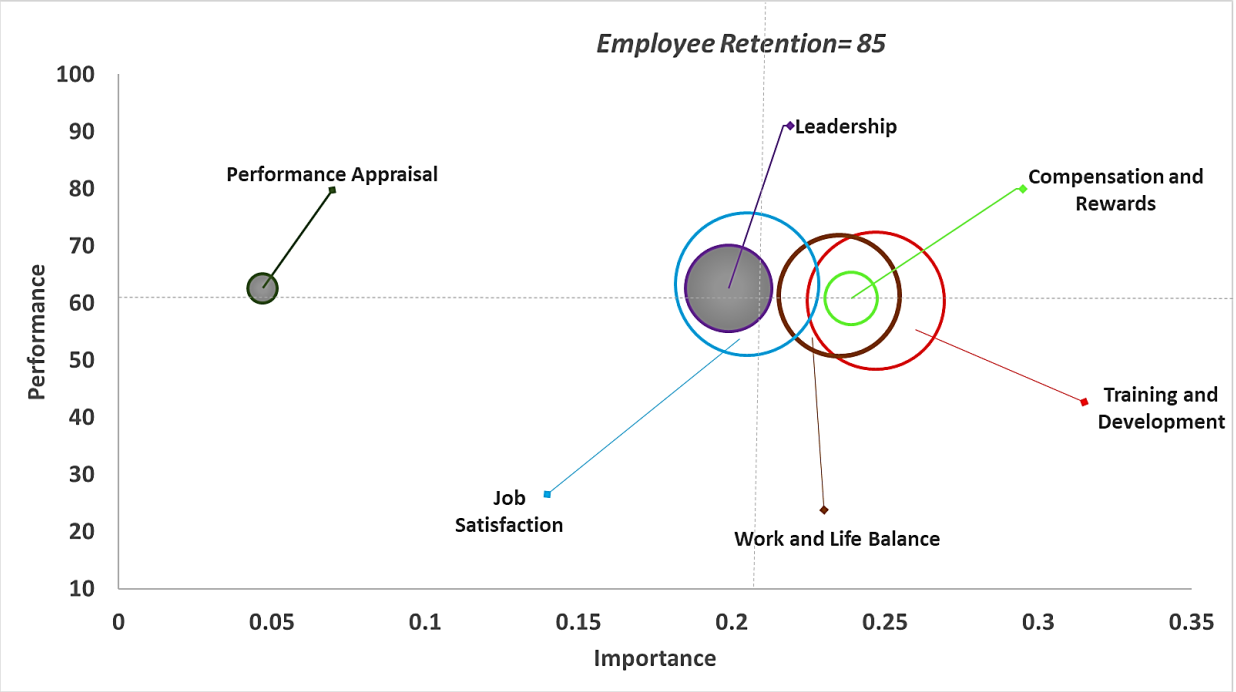
Source: Table by researcher
Note: %CNN: percentage of cases that do not meet the necessity conditions; d: necessity effect size; P value: permutation p value for necessity effect size

cIPMA shown in Figure 5.6 graphically represents the results, where the importance of each antecedent construct is plotted on the x-axis, and its performance is plotted on the y-axis. Each construct is represented by a circle, and the shading of the circle conveys whether the construct

is a necessary condition for achieving the target outcome (employee retention in this case). A shaded or black circle indicates that the construct is not a necessary condition, while a white circle denotes that it is.

Additionally, the size of each circle reflects the percentage of cases that do not meet the required condition for employee retention. Larger circles imply a greater number of cases that fall short, signalling areas requiring more focus. For enhanced clarity, the researcher has opted to use different colored borders around the circles to distinguish between the constructs, as many of them are closely concentrated in one region of the graph. This choice further improves visual interpretability without altering the underlying data or relationships represented.

Figure 4 Combined importance-performance map of employee retention



Source: Figure by researcher

In the cIPMA analysis, the constructs vary in both importance and performance regarding employee retention. Performance Appraisal is located in the lower-left quadrant of the map, indicating it has low importance (0.047) and relatively higher performance (62.574%). The size of the circle is also small, reflecting that only a small percentage of cases (0.912%) did not meet the necessary conditions. Additionally, with an effect size of less than 0.1 and a shaded circle, PFA is not a necessary condition for employee retention. As such, while it performs well, it does not need immediate prioritization.

Leadership, placed similarly in the lower-left quadrant of the map, shows moderate importance (0.199) and performance (62.491%). Its shaded circle further confirms that LDP is not a necessary condition for retention, with 7.295% of the cases not achieving the required leadership levels. Despite its moderate influence, leadership may not be as critical as other constructs in this specific context of higher education employee retention.

In contrast, Training and Development appears in the upper-right quadrant, which signals both high importance (0.247) and moderate performance (60.324%). As the circle size is larger, indicating that 18.237% of cases did not meet the necessary condition for T&D, this construct requires significant prioritization. The map shows that T&D is crucial for improving retention, as it has a direct impact on achieving desired retention outcomes.

Compensation and Rewards also lies in the upper-right quadrant but has slightly less importance (0.239) and similar performance (60.787%) compared to T&D. Despite its necessary condition status, only 2.736% of the cases have not met the required level, suggesting that while it is important, C&R is relatively well-managed. Prioritization can still help enhance retention efforts, but other constructs may need more immediate attention.

Job Satisfaction, located in the upper-center area of the map, shows high importance (0.205) and performance (63.314%), making it one of the key factors for employee retention. With 19.757% of the cases not meeting the necessary conditions, job satisfaction clearly needs prioritization. Failure to focus on this aspect may limit the success of other retention strategies.

Finally, Work and Life Balance, positioned near the right side of the map, also shows strong importance (0.235) and reasonable performance (61.268%). The size of the circle indicates that 14.59% of the cases did not meet the necessary condition for WLB, further supporting the need to prioritize it. Like JS, WLB plays a crucial role in improving employee retention.

In summary, constructs in the upper-right quadrant, such as T&D and C&R, require prioritization as they hold high importance and are necessary for employee retention. JS and WLB also emerge as essential constructs, located near the center-right of the map, highlighting their significance in driving retention. Conversely, PFA and LDP, positioned in the lower-left quadrant, do not appear to be necessary conditions and, while performing adequately, do not require immediate prioritization.

13. Theoretical implication of the study

The current study is theoretically anchored in Social Exchange Theory (SET), which serves as a foundational framework for understanding the interactions between employers and employees, particularly in the context of SHRM practices and employee retention (Coyle-Shapiro and Conway, 2005). Firstly, this research demonstrates that not all SHRM practices have a uniformly significant positive impact on JBS and ERT. Among the SHRM practices examined, TAD and CAR emerged as having the highest positive influence on both JBS and ERT, consistent with previous literature emphasizing the critical role of both factors in retaining employees. However, other practices such as PFA showed less direct influence on retention, highlighting that SHRM practices have varying degrees of impact.

Secondly, this study provides a significant contribution by identifying both the direct and mediating effects of JBS between SHRM practices and ERT. The findings show that JBS acts as a full mediator in the relationship between TAD and ERT, and as a partial mediator in the relationship between other variables. The model developed in this study has been refined by the researcher and demonstrates adequate predictive power, making it suitable for application beyond the current sample to out-of-sample data.

Finally, one of the key contributions lies in the novel application of cIPMA, combining the strengths of IPMA and NCA. While IPMA highlights the importance and performance of SHRM practices, NCA offers insights into which conditions are necessary for achieving employee retention. This dual approach not only confirms the significant role of SHRM practices in retaining academic staff but also underscores the importance of aligning HR strategies to ensure competitive advantage in higher education institutions.

14. Recommendations of the study

The present study examined the impact of Strategic Human Resource Management practices on employee retention and job satisfaction in Afghanistan's higher education sector. Based on the findings, several recommendations can be drawn to enhance HR practices and improve retention outcomes. This section summarizes the most important policy implications and recommendations that can guide both the institutional leaders and mangers and policymakers in the government, making informed decisions to strengthen the quality in higher education.

14.1 Recommendations for higher education institutions in Afghanistan

1. The higher education institutions are recommended to implement structured career development, promotion and qualification improvement programs to address the scarcity of highly ranked faculty members, such as professors and associate professors. One key approach is to introduce internal promotion pathways based on merit, research output, and teaching excellence, enabling junior faculty members to rise through academic ranks.

2. Institutions should actively encourage collaborative research initiatives between departments, other national universities, and international partners. Facilitating faculty research through access to research grants, conference participation, and publication support will not only enhance faculty job satisfaction but also raise the institution's academic profile.

3. Higher education institutions in Afghanistan are recommended to offer regionally competitive salaries supplemented by long-term service bonuses and retirement benefits to encourage faculty retention. Additionally, offering research funding and paid development opportunities can reduce the appeal of international opportunities, directly tackling brain drain.

4. Redesign the performance appraisal process to be more transparent, tying appraisals to clear and achievable career development opportunities. Appraisals should not only focus on teaching but also reward research output, community service, and mentorship contributions.

5. Implement regular 360-degree feedback from both colleagues and students, allowing a more comprehensive assessment of faculty performance, which could foster a fairer and more motivating evaluation system.

6. Leaders of higher education institutions in Afghanistan should prioritize supporting faculty development by providing mentorship programs, research funding, and professional growth opportunities. By actively promoting and facilitating access to these resources, leaders can enhance the quality of teaching and research, motivating faculty to excel and stay committed to the institution.

7. Leaders of higher education institutions should actively engage faculty members by involving them in key decision-making processes, such as curriculum design, research priorities, and institutional policies. Creating collaborative platforms where faculty input is valued will not only enhance their sense of ownership and belonging but also improve the overall quality of academic programs, leading to stronger retention and institutional loyalty.

8. Institutions must develop policies that promote a better work-life balance for academic staff. Given the demanding nature of teaching and research, flexible working hours, childcare support, and remote working options (where applicable) can reduce burnout and improve faculty retention.

14.2 Recommendations for Afghanistan government policy makers

1. The government should prioritize increasing the number of universities and departments offering PhD programs across various disciplines. This expansion will allow faculty members to pursue higher education within the country, reducing the need to go abroad and fostering academic growth domestically. By investing in the infrastructure, faculty recruitment, and resources necessary to support more PhD programs, the government can enhance the overall quality of higher education and create a sustainable academic ecosystem that promotes research and innovation.

2. The government should forge strategic partnerships with countries known for their strong education systems to provide fully funded scholarships for Afghan faculty to pursue advanced degrees abroad. These programs should require returning service commitments, ensuring that faculty members contribute to the development of Afghanistan's higher education sector upon completion.

3. The government is recommended to take immediate steps to revise policies that hinder both female faculty members and students from actively contributing to higher education, which further exacerbates the shortage of qualified academic staff. Female representation, both as educators and students, is essential for creating a balanced and diverse academic workforce. Policies should be introduced to provide women with equal opportunities for employment, leadership roles, and professional development in higher education institutions, while also reopening the doors of universities to female students, ensuring their access to higher education and fostering a more inclusive and qualified academic environment.

4. The government is recommended to provide greater autonomy to public higher education institutions, allowing them to operate independently in key areas such as faculty development, compensation structures, and research initiatives. Autonomy will enable universities to make decisions that best address their specific needs, including offering competitive compensation and rewards, and designing targeted training and development programs.

5. The government should focus on enhancing quality assurance in higher education institutions by investing in infrastructure, such as modern libraries, well-equipped laboratories, and digital resources. These improvements are essential to support both teaching and research activities, ensuring faculty members have access to up-to-date academic resources that enable them to deliver quality education and engage in meaningful, impactful research.

15. Limitations of the study

1. This study is geographically limited to a few selected provinces of Afghanistan—Kabul, Qandahar, and Khost. While these provinces represent key regions of the country, the findings may not be fully representative of all higher education institutions across Afghanistan.

2. Due to logistical and security challenges, the study employed convenience sampling rather than random sampling, which may introduce selection bias.

3. This study did not capture the perspectives of female faculty members to a significant extent due to restrictions imposed by current government policies on female employment in higher education. As a result, the findings may not fully reflect gendered differences in faculty experiences, or the specific challenges faced by female academics in Afghanistan's higher education sector.

4. The study employed a cross-sectional research design, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships between SHRM practices and employee retention. A longitudinal study would provide more robust insights into how these relationships evolve over time, especially in a volatile socio-political environment like Afghanistan.

5. The study is limited to public universities, and as such, the findings may not be applicable to private higher education institutions in Afghanistan.

16. Scope for future research

Future research could expand upon the findings of this study by conducting longitudinal analyses to better capture the evolving dynamics of employee retention in Afghanistan's higher education sector. Expanding the geographical scope to include more provinces, and exploring both public and private institutions, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of SHRM practices across different contexts. Additionally, future studies could examine the moderating role of demographic variables, such as age, experience, and education level, on faculty retention. Furthermore, investigating the role of external factors such as political instability and economic conditions could yield deeper insights into retention challenges.

Lastly, studies could explore the long-term impact of recent government policies on faculty retention and development.

17. Conclusion

The present study examined the relationship between Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) practices and employee retention in Afghanistan's public higher education institutions. By focusing on key SHRM practices such as training and development, compensation and rewards, performance appraisal, leadership, and work-life balance, the study explored both the direct and indirect effects of these variables on job satisfaction and employee retention. Employing advanced methods such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA), and Necessary Condition Analysis (NCA), the study provided valuable insights into how these practices impact retention outcomes in a challenging socio-political context like Afghanistan’s education sector.

The findings revealed that training and development, compensation and rewards, leadership, and work-life balance play crucial roles in shaping job satisfaction and employee retention. Furthermore, job satisfaction emerged as a significant mediator between SHRM practices and employee retention, confirming its critical role in enhancing retention outcomes. The IPMA results highlighted areas where improvements in SHRM practices are needed, with training and development and compensation and rewards being identified as priority areas for intervention. Additionally, the NCA findings demonstrated that several constructs are necessary conditions for achieving desired retention outcomes, further guiding higher education institutions toward more focused and strategic improvements.

This study contributes both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it expands the body of knowledge on SHRM and employee retention in a higher education context, particularly in a developing country like Afghanistan. It also offers a novel integration of IPMA and NCA within the SHRM framework. Practically, the study provides actionable recommendations for policymakers and higher education institutions to improve faculty retention by focusing on key SHRM practices and addressing critical gaps. Despite its contributions, the study has limitations, such as its cross-sectional nature and the focus on public institutions, which future research can address by expanding the scope to private universities and incorporating longitudinal data.

In conclusion, this research underscores the importance of adopting comprehensive SHRM strategies to foster employee satisfaction and retention in Afghanistan's higher education institutions. By addressing the key factors identified, institutions can enhance their ability to retain qualified academic staff, ultimately contributing to the development of a more robust and resilient education sector in the country.

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